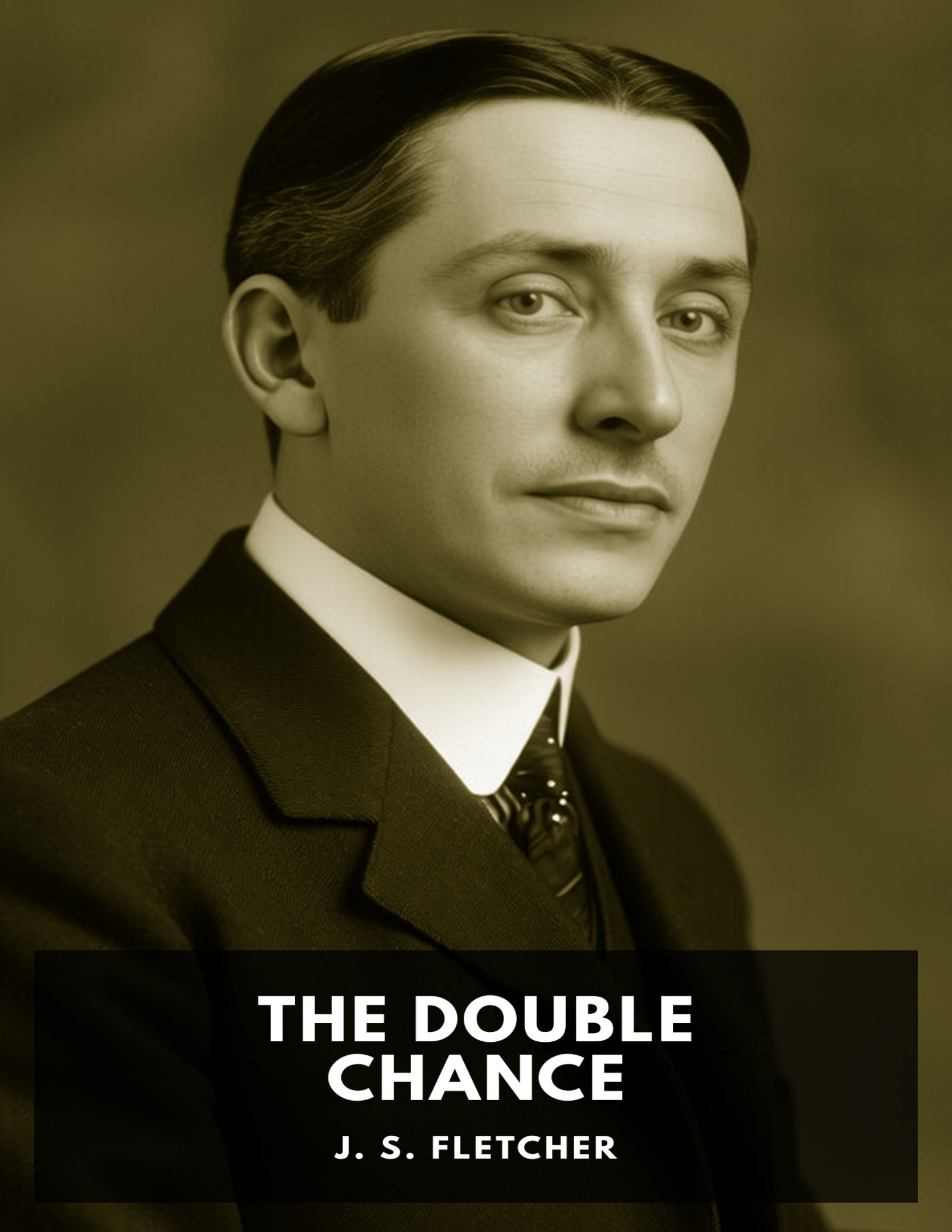

# THE DOUBLE CHANCE

J. S. FLETCHER

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# 1
## The Old Signal

On a certain evening of early spring, just near the time when the last glimmer of twilight is about to fade into the final delicate shades of dusk, a woman opened the door of a lonely cottage which stood in the midst of a belt of fir trees high above a deep valley, and, standing on the doorstep, looked at the lights which had already begun to twinkle far below. From force of habit, contracted long before and practised through many years, she shaded her eyes with her right hand, although the sun had then been gone down a good half-hour; an observer would have thought she was peering anxiously through the gloom—in reality she was listening for the sound of a footstep on the rocky path which came upwards from the stream at the foot of the bank. It was her custom to listen for this footstep every night, and because the sun shone directly on the place in spring and summer at that hour she had contracted the custom of shielding her eyes.

The familiar aspects of the landscape were still plainly visible to this solitary watcher. On the opposite side of the valley she saw the ancient castle in which a Saxon king had kept his state, and near it the old church, square-towered, grey-walled, scarcely less ancient; the picturesque inn, with its thatched roof and timbered gables; an old farmstead or two; cottages, whose ages were reckoned by generations instead of by years. Near by was a complete contrast in a little town of red-brick cottages, built on regular and mathematical lines, not one brick of which had been there in her childhood—no, nor for years after she was wife and mother. There was always some resentment in her as she looked at these evidences of modernity; she remembered that where the new village now lay there were fields which were famous for their mushrooms, and coppices celebrated for their nuts and trees, under which she and her companions had played. And between this new hive of industry and the river rose the outward evidence of the underground force which had made this change between old and new—the outer works of a coal mine, the gigantic shaftings, the mighty scaffoldings,

the great wheels, the sheds, enginehouses, pumping-houses, machinery-houses, the mountainous banks of slag—all of which had sprung into being since that day when a scientific man with a long nose and blue spectacles who was stopping at the Castle told Sir Robert Mannersley that his ancient estate lay over a coal seam which might prove to be worth millions.

Margaret Britten turned from this scene full of a wistful longing. She had the instinct of folk who are born and bred on the soil, and change was hard to bear. She had first seen the light in that cottage; she and her man had lived in it when her own father and mother were dead; there she had borne her own children. All connected with her had earned their living on the land in the old-fashioned ways—as labourers, gamekeepers, woodmen. Now there was only one man of her family left—her son Jim—and instead of following the plough over the broad uplands behind the cottage, or assuming the keeper's velvet coat, he, too, had been claimed by King Coal, and earned his money—good money, as she knew—as checkweighman at the colliery.

As she turned to glance within the cottage doorway Margaret heard Jim's step on the rock-strewn pathway far beneath, and then his familiar whistle. She ran within and opened the door of the oven a few inches, and took a peep at something which was undergoing some process inside, and thereby suffered a savoury odour to escape which reached the nostrils of Mr James Britten twenty yards away.

'That smells good, mother!' he exclaimed a minute later, as he came bustling into the cottage, and seizing Margaret by her ample waist kissed both her cheeks. 'You could smell that over at Mannersley! What is it this time?'

'It's liver and bacon, with an onion for flavour, and a gravy that you could stand a spoon in, my lad,' replied Margaret, as she began to bustle about. 'So get your cleaning-up done and fall to while it's hot.'

'No second invitation needed, mother,' responded Jim, with alacrity, and plunged into the back place of the cottage, where he was presently making a great noise with soap and water, and whence he quickly emerged with shining face and damp hair. 'I'm sharper set than usual tonight, mother,' he remarked, as he drew a chair to the table and looked approvingly at the smoking dish which Margaret set before him.

'Then lay knife aboard, lad,' counselled his mother.

Now that her immediate duties were done she sat down in her easy chair by the hearth and watched her son eat, a smile of placid enjoyment overspreading her broad, good-humoured countenance. She was one of those old-fashioned women who delight in seeing their menfolk do full justice to their victuals, and who believe—and rightly—that a vigorous and hearty appetite is the surest sign of sound health. Margaret Britten, in short, was happiest when she beheld Jim at the close of his day's labours proving himself a mighty trencherman, and it was her great pride to study his appetite and to tickle his palate. And he was worth it, she said to herself as she sat watching him—a fine, handsome lad of five-and-twenty, straight as a willow-wand, with clear grey eyes and direct look, and a head of thick brown hair which still curled as obstinately as when he was a baby in arms. No properer young man in all that countryside, thought Margaret; nor one, other folk might have said, that was more modest, considering that he was all that was left to a mother who had consequently done her best to spoil him.

'Any news today, Jim?' asked Margaret, when the young man had taken off the final edge of his appetite. 'Aught happened?'

'Well, I have heard some news, mother,' replied Jim, thoughtfully regarding the inroads which he had made on his supper-dish, and then helping himself again. 'It's little more than a rumour, but I believe there's a lot of truth in it. Sir Robert's thinking of starting a grand sort of club for the men.'

'Some of them men'll get till they don't know what ails 'em,' said Margaret, with a sniff. 'Why can't they bide at home same as you do?'

Jim laughed, and gave her a wink. 'Most of 'em haven't got as comfortable homes as I have, mother,' he said. 'A place like that would do a lot of good.'

'I reckon that'll be one of Miss Phillipa's ideas,' said Margaret. 'She's always full of plans for doing grand things for them colliers. Nobody did nought for farm-labourers in my time.'

'We live in different times, mother,' said Jim.

'Aye, marry, and see some different goings-on!' sighed Margaret. She rose and poured fresh tea into her son's cup. 'I saw that new manager today,' she said. 'I went down the lane to see how poor Sarah Dickinson was, and he came by, riding his horse, when I was standing at their garden gate talking to Jane Dickinson. I don't wonder the men don't like him, Jim—there's no doubt he's a handsome young fellow, but I never saw such

eyes in all my born days! He fair made me dither—his eyes is that black and fierce.'

'I don't know how it is that Mr Quinton isn't liked,' said Jim, thoughtfully. 'And as to calling him a new manager, mother—why, he's been here nearly two years! Time to prove him, that. I expect it's because he's very firm, and perhaps a bit strict and severe.'

'Well, I wouldn't like to get across with him,' said Margaret. 'Take care you don't, my lad.'

'There's no fear of that, mother,' answered Jim. 'Mr Quinton's naught to say to folk who behave themselves.'

He rose from the table, and, according to a nightly custom on which he insisted, gathered the supper things together and carried them into the back place, whither Margaret presently retired to wash them up. Then he lighted his pipe, and after lounging about a little got some books and writing material out of a drawer and spread them on the table in preparation for an evening's study. For Mr James Britten had ambition, and meant to rise in the world.

On this occasion, however, he had only just opened a book when the latch of the door was lifted, and a girl's clear, high-bred voice said: 'May I come in, Mrs Britten—are you there?'

Before Jim could respond Margaret had heard Miss Phillipa Mannersley's voice, and came bustling out of the back place with smiles all over her countenance.

'Eh, bless your bonny face, miss!' she cried. 'The idea of seeing you at this time of the day! But you was always up to some sort of notions ever since you was a little girl.'

'Well, my notion this evening, Mrs Britten, was that I must really have a good walk before dinner,' said Phillipa, laughing. 'So I made Ann Mary come round the woods with me, and we were so near you I felt that I must look in. Ann Mary, Jim,' she continued, giving the young checkweighman an arch look, 'is somewhere outside—perhaps peeping through the window. Hadn't you better go and see?'

'Oh, Miss Phillipa, Miss Phillipa!' said Margaret, when Jim had shot out of the cottage with remarkable alacrity. 'The idea of you encouraging young people in their love affairs.'

'Well, why shouldn't I, Mrs Britten?' asked Phillipa. 'I'm sure it's a very delightful thing to see young people so much in love with each other as Jim

and Ann Mary are. And I think Ann Mary deserves a treat—I have made her walk so far. And I thought, Mrs Britten, that while they have their little talk outside you would perhaps treat me to a glass of that delicious cowslip wine that you gave me last time I was here—it won't spoil my dinner, I can assure you!'

'Eh, that it won't, miss, nor a bit of my homemade seed-cake, neither!' exclaimed Margaret, bustling into the next room. 'No, I'll warrant 'em both to do nobody harm.'

Left to herself for the moment, Phillipa Mannersley's pretty face changed, as suddenly as a hillside bathed in sunshine changes when a sudden storm, a sudden sweeping of cloud and rain, blots out all the light and colour. It was a pretty, vivacious, laughing face which had so unexpectedly presented itself in the little cottage; as Margaret's back was turned it became an anxious and troubled face. The violet eyes grew dark with a strange perplexity; the warm, smiling mouth became drawn and sad; the slender fingers interlaced themselves restlessly. And as if against their will the violet eyes lifted themselves to a photograph which hung on one side of the mantelpiece—an expensively-framed photograph of a young man between whom and herself there was more than a likeness. She sat gazing at the fire with a troubled expression until she heard a jingle of glass and china. As Margaret reentered with a tray the previous vivacity of voice and manner returned. A moment later she was laughing and chatting to the old woman as if she had not a care in the world.

Meanwhile, Mr James Britten, whose lady-love, a winsome maiden named Ann Mary Riley, Miss Mannersley's protégée from childhood, and now her attached and faithful maid, had waited his coming at the garden gate, was being drawn by that young lady out of all possible earshot of the cottage. There was something mysterious in the way in which Ann Mary led him away. But at last she paused in the shadow of a hedgerow.

'Jim,' she whispered, 'weren't you surprised to see Miss Phillipa tonight?'

'I was a bit surprised,' Jim admitted.

'She's come on purpose to see you,' she whispered. 'I believe there's some trouble. I was to tell you that when she comes out you're to go a little way down the path with us; she wants to speak to you about something. Jim, she's in awful trouble. She cried once or twice coming here, and I've only once seen her cry before, and that was when—'

‘Hush, hush, lass!’ said Jim. ‘Let’s go back and wait outside the door.’

Ten minutes later Phillipa’s clear voice was heard saying farewell to Margaret. She came out into the dusk calling the lovers.

‘I want to give Ann Mary a taste of my cowslip wine,’ said Margaret, who had followed Phillipa to the door. ‘Happen Jim’ll see Miss Phillipa down to the bottom, and Ann Mary can run after.’

Jim led the way down the path in silence until Phillipa stopped him. Looking at her in the faint light he saw that her face was greatly troubled. She laid her hand on his arm.

‘Jim,’ she said, ‘Ann Mary told you that I had come purposely to see you?’

‘Yes, miss,’ he answered.

She remained silent for a moment, and then, with a frightened look round, drew nearer to him, and spoke in a lower whisper. ‘Jim, my cousin has escaped!’

Jim Britten started as if she had told him that the mine had blown up. He drew back, staring at her.

‘Miss Phillipa!’ he whispered. ‘Mr Clinton—escaped!’

‘Yes, Jim. And oh, Jim, I’m afraid—afraid he’s some desperate project in coming down here to Mannersley, to my father—to—to me!’ she said. ‘Listen, Jim. I got a letter this morning from a friend of mine in London enclosing one which she said had been sent to her with a most urgent request that it should be sent on to me under cover of one from her. I opened the blank envelope, and found a letter from my cousin. He told me that he had made his escape, and would leave no stone unturned to prove his innocence. There was the same old bitter spirit against—against my father, Jim. He vowed and protested his innocence just as—but you know, Jim.’

‘Yes, Miss Phillipa,’ said Jim, in a strained voice, ‘I know—I know!’

‘And he reiterated all he said about conspiracies and plots, and so on,’ she continued. ‘Oh, I’m sure he means to come back to Mannersley! And he’ll come to you first, Jim, because you’re his foster-brother.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder, miss,’ said Jim, quietly. ‘In fact, since you told me that he’d got away that’s just what I’ve made up my mind to; and in that case make yourself easy, miss—I’ll let you know.’

‘Heaven bless you!’ she said. ‘And—but here’s Ann Mary. Come, Ann Mary, we must hurry home.’

A minute later Jim Britten had kissed his sweetheart, pressed her young mistress's hand, and was hastening up the rocky path to the cottage. He found his mother yawning in her chair.

'Well, Jim, lad,' she said, 'I shall be off to my rest—I expect you'll be for sitting up over your books and figures.'

'Aye, mother,' he answered, 'I shall sit up latish tonight. I've a lot to do, and I'm not a bit sleepy.'

He sat working—and thinking—hour after hour, and there was always a look of strained attention, of expectancy, on his face, in spite of the books. And at last, in the dead silence of midnight, came what he expected—a summons that he had known in years of old—a curious tap at the cottage window. Jim Britten rose slowly and, turning down the lamp, went over and unbarred the door.

# 2
## ESCAPED!

Out of the shelter of a holly-bush which flanked the cottage porch a man's figure emerged, and without a word slipped past Jim into the living room. In the same silence Jim barred the door again, and turned to the lamp. The visitor laid a hand on his arm in passing.

'Jim—you knew the old signal!'

Jim turned up the light. It fell on the face and figure of a young man of apparently twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, handsome of feature, slender and graceful of body. But the face was worn and strained, and it seemed to Jim that the frame was thin and wasted. He hastily pushed forward a chair to the hearth, and poured out some hot milk which he had been keeping in readiness on the hob.

'Sit down, sir, and drink that,' he said. 'You're cold.'

'I came through the woods at the back, Jim. Ah, that's good—thank you. You didn't expect to see me, Jim?'

'I did, sir,' said Jim, pushing his visitor into a chair. 'I knew you'd come to me.'

The visitor stared at him in surprise, and half started from his chair.

'How did you know?' he exclaimed. 'It's not—you haven't seen anything in the papers?'

'Your cousin has been here—tonight, sir,' replied Jim, quietly.

The young man finished the glass of hot milk which Jim had handed him, and looked thoughtfully at the fire for a few moments. And while he was thus occupied Jim furtively looked at him. He saw that he was well and fashionably dressed, and scrupulously groomed, as he always remembered him being; but he also saw that the dark, closely-cropped hair had streaks of silver in it, and that there were lines and wrinkles in the almost boyish face which had not been there when he had last seen it. And the figure, which he remembered as having been so sprightly and agile, seemed in some indefinable way to have become wearied and crushed, in spite of the smart suit and

fine linen. Face and figure were those of a man who has been into the valley of bitterness.

'I wonder where else I should go, Jim?' said the visitor, suddenly breaking the silence. 'Considering that all my thoughts have been fixed on this place for the last two years it was only natural that I should turn here, for more reasons than one, even if I don't stop more than a few hours. And that's what's in my mind—there are two people I want to see—must see—and after that I'm off!'

'But, Mr Clinton—'

'You needn't "Mr" me, Jim, nor "sir" me either,' interposed the other; 'after all, when the truth's told, I'm only an escaped convict!'

'Why, sir, that's just where it is,' said Jim, bluntly. 'They'll be after you, no doubt.'

'And that's just why I'm safe here for a while, Jim,' returned Clinton. 'They'd never expect me to come down to Mannersley. It's a fortnight now since I got away. Pooh! I'm not afraid of 'em—not I, indeed!'

'I don't know how you managed it, sir,' said Jim, wonderingly.

Clinton smiled. 'Managed it!' he said. 'Why, as easily as anything, bar the first preliminary risk. Warrinder, when he found they'd sent me to Dartmoor, took a sort of hunting-box down there, as close as ever he could get, and he devised a means of letting me know. Then he waited—always in readiness—day and night, and at last my chance came, and I took it. Of course, I ran the gauntlet. They had a pot-shot or two at me, Jim. Look there.'

He turned up the cuff of his left sleeve as he spoke, and revealed a newly-healed wound which ran across the forearm.

'Only a scratch, you see, but near enough,' he continued. 'Well, I got to Warrinder's place all right, and the rest has been easy. It was Warrinder who brought me up here in his motor—he's putting up at Ashford, across country there, until tomorrow night, when he's going to meet me at Dead Man's Cross—you know, Jim—at midnight. Then he'll run me to Liverpool. There's a full kit waiting there for me, and I'm off to Canada.'

Jim looked up from a steady contemplation of the fire.

'Mr Clinton, sir, what do you want down here?' he asked.

Clinton's countenance assumed a determined expression. He smote the knuckles of his right hand against the palm of his left.

‘I want to see two people, Jim—I will and must see both!’ he answered, the resolution in his voice made fiercer by the hushed whisper in which, at a signal from Jim, he had spoken ever since entering the cottage. ‘And you can guess whom they are—my uncle and my cousin. But, above all, Sir Robert!’

‘Why Sir Robert so particularly, sir?’

‘Because he, more than anybody, can put things in motion for clearing me!’ said Clinton. ‘He must do it—he shall do it!’

Jim held up a finger. ‘Mr Clinton,’ he said, ‘you won’t misunderstand Jim Britten—but supposing Sir Robert believes you guilty?’

The young man’s brows knitted, and his lips tightened; but in a moment his face cleared.

‘Isn’t that exactly a reason why I should see him and do my best to convince him of my innocence?’ he said. ‘He never gave me one single chance, Jim, as you know. You know what a hard, proud man he is, and when it came to it he shut himself up within his pride and wouldn’t hear a word from me. I know, of course, I’d got a bad name from my previous goings on. I know he’d a lot of trouble with me when I was at Eton. I know I was sent down from Cambridge. I know he had to pay my debts twice. I know I got mixed up with a very shady lot at Newmarket—’

‘Wasn’t this Mr Warrinder one of them, sir?’ asked Jim.

‘Never mind that, Jim. Warrinder’s stuck to me like a brick,’ replied Clinton. ‘Well, I know, I say, that I went the pace pretty badly (I’ve had time to reflect upon it since, I can tell you!) but there’s an ocean of difference between being rackety and gambling, and so on, and being a common thief. I am as innocent of that charge as your dear old mother is, Jim, before heaven!’

‘I always believed it, sir,’ said Jim, looking at him steadily. ‘And I know a rare lot of people who believe just the same—a rare lot.’

‘Then who was, who is, the scoundrel for whom I’ve suffered?’ said Clinton, hotly. ‘Why, because I was a sort of black sheep as a boy, was my uncle only too ready to believe this thing against me when it came?’

‘I believe it nearly broke his heart, Mr Clinton,’ said Jim. ‘He’s never seemed to me to be the same man since.’

‘It’s pretty nearly broken my life,’ said Clinton, grimly. ‘But look here, Jim, I must see my uncle, if only to impress upon him that it’s his solemn

duty to stir himself in this matter. Good heavens! I should think any fool could see why.'

'Perhaps I don't quite see all you mean, sir,' said Jim.

Clinton leant forward, and began to emphasise his point with taps of his finger on his foster-brother's arm.

'My uncle is getting an old man,' he said, 'and it is most unlikely that he will ever marry again.'

'He'll never marry again, sir!' exclaimed Jim. 'He's too much taken up with Miss Phillipa.'

'He has no sons,' continued Clinton, 'and no brothers living. Consequently, I, his nephew, as only son of his late brother, Philip Mannersley, succeed at his death to the title.'

'Well, sir?'

'For the honour of the title—we've borne it since the fourteenth century, Jim, though you're such an old Radical that that means nothing to you—he ought to have this affair reopened. The thing to do is to find the real culprit!' exclaimed Clinton. 'Find the guilty man! I must and will see Sir Robert, Jim, if I have to force my way to him. I will make him see that I am innocent, and that it is his duty, even after these two years—two years of misery and degradation to me—to reopen the matter and have me cleared. I want to see him in secret if it can be arranged; if it can't force my way to him, and take whatever consequences may come.'

Jim Britten remained silent for a while, thinking things over. At last he looked earnestly at Clinton and spoke in a still more earnest tone.

'Mr Clinton,' he said, 'it would be a bad job, sir, if anything happened here that let it get made known that you were back and had got across again with Sir Robert—it would.'

'Why, Jim?'

'Why, sir, because all the men, to every man and lad, believed you innocent, and that there was some plot against you,' answered Jim. 'On that point to this day, sir, it wouldn't take much to raise a riot.'

Clinton stared at him almost incredulously.

'You know, sir, what a favourite you were,' continued Jim. 'You used to talk to them about racing, and give them tips, and—'

He paused, and seemed to be inviting Clinton to speak.

'Well,' said Clinton, 'what then, Jim?'

Jim bent forward and spoke in an earnest whisper. ‘There’s Miss Phillipa to be considered, Mr Clinton,’ he said. ‘Hasn’t she been through enough already?’

Clinton jumped to his feet in an agitation which he could not conceal.

‘Been through enough!’ he said hoarsely. ‘I should think she has been through enough—we’ve both been through enough! Jim, I must see Phillipa—will see her, because if my uncle refuses to do what he can do, I want her—’

‘Well, sir?’

‘I want her to follow me out there, and we’ll start a new life in a new land!’ said Clinton, clenching his hands. ‘We’re engaged, after all, and her first duty’s to me!’

Jim had risen too, and he stood staring sadly at his foster-brother.

‘Nay, sir, nay!’ he said. ‘Get yourself cleared first. You’ve made a mistake, sir. I told Miss Phillipa I should tell you so. You shouldn’t have broken away from there, sir. There wasn’t long to stop; it would soon have passed, and you’d have been a free man. Now you’re not free. Listen, Mr Clinton. I’ll arrange for you to see Miss Phillipa tomorrow night, and you must see what she says about seeing her father. But if you’ll take my advice, sir, when that’s done you’ll go back and give yourself up. And—’

The sound of a footstep in the room overhead made them both start.

‘That’s mother,’ said Jim. ‘I shall have to tell her you’re here, sir. You don’t mind, sir?’

‘Mind!’ exclaimed Clinton. ‘If you’d seen as few kind faces as I have this last year or two you’d be glad to see one you could trust, Jim!’

A moment later Margaret, clad in a medley of nondescript garments and a mighty night-cap, burst into the room and threw her arms round her foster-son’s neck.

Had the three people thus reunited only known it, a man who had followed Clinton Mannersley through the woods, and had watched him and Jim Britten through the cottage window, now stole softly away and made off towards the village, meditating on the secret he had discovered.

# 3
## She Still Cares!

Sir Robert Mannersley, seventeenth of his line in the proud order of the Baronetage, had been a poor man until coal was found on his estate, and he was glad, for the sake of his family, to develop the enormous mineral wealth which lay all around him. He would have liked to preserve some of the old simplicity and dignity of life in the immediate vicinity of the Castle, but all that was left of old times was the Castle itself, which was really an old house, picturesque and romantic enough now that Time had mellowed it, that had been built out of the ruins of the ancient fortress a hundred years after the latter had been destroyed. Within its time-mellowed chambers Sir Robert found his great recreation. The responsibilities of the colliery had transformed him into a businessman, because he was a conscientious man, and he made a point of attending at his offices with punctuality and assiduity; but he was never so happy as when under his own roof-tree and by his own hearth, talking to his friends or showing them some of his treasures.

On the evening of the day following Phillipa Mannersley's visit to the checkweighman's cottage on the opposite side of the valley three people sat round the hearth in Sir Robert's study examining an old Roman lamp which he had just taken from a cabinet. Sir Robert himself sat in his accustomed easy chair, by which stood a small table supporting a shaded lamp, the light of which fell on his finely-chiselled features, his snowy hair and moustache, his long, shapely fingers moving lovingly about the curio as he explained its peculiarities and beauties to his daughter and his guest. Phillipa, prettier than ever in her dinner dress, hung over her father's chair; the guest stood before them on the hearthrug. And a close observer would have seen that while he manifested a polite interest in the Roman lamp, Mr Mark Quinton was much more interested in its owner's daughter.

The manager of Mannersley Main was a tall, well-built man of apparently thirty years of age, who had much of the military man in his appearance, in his movements, his gestures, the quick flash of his eye—above every-

thing, in the square, determined jaw. It required little knowledge of human nature to see that Mark Quinton was a born martinet—a man destined to command and to have his own way. If his stern lips issued an order, and his steel-blue eyes emphasised it, most men under him hastened to carry it out without demur. But the stern lips were tender enough, and the keen eyes soft enough, whenever Miss Phillipa Mannersley happened to be near, and some people were beginning to notice the fact.

'And I believe there is no other specimen of this particular date, or of this particular sort, with the exception of one in the British Museum in London,' said Sir Robert, lovingly handling his Roman lamp. 'A somewhat similar lamp was unearthed some years ago, but it was not at all of the date or class of this—not at all!'

'Wherefore Mannersley Castle and its owner can boast themselves of being in possession of something which would be quite unique if it were not for that tiresome British Museum,' said Phillipa, patting her father's head. 'You ought to be flattered at making the acquaintance of such treasures, Mr Quinton. And now I must leave you gentlemen to entertain yourselves, for I am going out.'

'Out, my dear, at this hour?' exclaimed Sir Robert. 'Dear me, why—'

'Only for a while, papa, and it is on an errand of mercy—one of my old women,' said Phillipa. 'I shall be home again before you know I am gone.'

'I sincerely hope, my dear, that the object of your visit does not reside in the miners' village?' said Sir Robert.

'Shall I go with you wherever it is, Miss Mannersley?' said Quinton. 'It is rather late, and though—'

'Thanks, no, really,' she said. 'Ann Mary, you know, goes with me everywhere. I shall see you on my return, Mr Quinton.' She gave him a light nod, and left the room.

Sir Robert rose from his chair. 'Roman art, eh?' he said. 'Ah! that reminds me that I had some Roman coins sent to me the other day. I'll show them to you. They're in another room. Sit down, Quinton, and I'll fetch them. Light another cigar, do!'

The old Baronet went out of the room, and the manager walked over to a side table to take a cigar from an open case; in passing another small table on his way, he saw a card lying on it—a mere scrap of card, crumpled and dirty—and before he could turn his eyes from it read what was written on it: 'The Hermit's Cell—tonight—nine-thirty.'

He chose a cigar, went back to the hearth, and stood there wondering what such a mysterious sentence meant. The door opened—Phillipa returned, in walking dress. She looked flurried, and a little upset.

'All alone, Mr Quinton!' she exclaimed.

'Your father is fetching some coins, Miss Mannersley,' he answered.

'Poor you!' she said. 'I—I left something here. I am so careless in leaving things lying about. I—oh, here it is—an address.'

Before Quinton had realised the situation she had snatched up the card he had unwittingly seen, and with a smiling nod had again quitted the room.

When Sir Robert came sauntering back with a tray of coins, some five minutes later, Quinton had let his cigar die out, and was standing very erect and set of face before the old Baronet's desk.

'Now these coins, Quinton,' began Sir Robert, 'are, I believe—'

Quinton drew his attention with a short cough. 'Sir Robert,' he said.

The elder man glanced at him, set down the tray of coins, and quietly took his own chair. 'Go on, Quinton,' he said, not unkindly. 'I had an idea that you wanted to speak to me.'

'Yes,' said Quinton—' yes. The fact is, I think I ought to go away. I am not the sort of man to beat about the bush, especially with you, and—I am in love with your daughter.'

The old man nodded his head several times. 'Aye,' he said, 'so I thought, Quinton—so I thought. Well, I see no harm in that. Your family is of equal rank with mine, and I have the greatest opinion of you in every way.'

'Then you would—' cried Quinton, moved out of his usual calmness.

'Give her to you?' interposed Sir Robert, with a smile. 'Aye, very likely I would. But, Quinton, I fear it's no use. Sit down. You know the terrible stain on our recent history?' he went on, when the younger man had taken a seat. 'You have heard of what happened to my nephew just before you came here?'

Quinton bowed his head without speaking.

'They were always fond of each other as boy and girl,' continued Sir Robert; 'and, despite all that has happened, I believe she still cares for that graceless young scoundrel. Quinton, I tremble to think of what may happen when—when he is free again!'

Quinton sat in silence for some time. At last he looked the old man earnestly in the face.

'Sir Robert!' he said. 'Do you really believe your nephew was guilty?'

Sir Robert passed his hand over his forehead. ‘I wish I could think else!’ he answered. ‘But—I can’t!’

Quinton rose. ‘I’ll go now,’ he said. ‘You—you’ll understand. And you’ll let me speak to you some other time, sir?’

He pressed the hand which the old man gave him, and, leaving the study, got his hat and coat and let himself out by a side door into the grounds. He wanted to be alone—wanted to think.

‘Still cares for that graceless young scoundrel!’ he said, bitterly.

If that were true, what hope was there for him?

# 4
## The Wicket-Gate

The place which Clinton Mannersley had selected as a suitable rendezvous was one well known to Phillipa and himself; it was a lonely cave, which centuries earlier had been transformed into a rude oratory by a hermit, whose ghost was said to haunt it, and Clinton had accordingly fixed upon it as the most likely place wherein to meet his cousin.

Phillipa gained the rendezvous by a roundabout way. As she reached it a figure rose out of the darkness.

'Phillipa!'

'Clinton!'

For a moment she let him take her in his arms and kiss her; for a moment the recollection of their old boy-and-girl love welled up strongly within her; for a moment she felt inclined to remember nothing but that he had suffered terribly, and that she had the instinct to take him to her bosom and comfort him. But then the danger of his situation, the dire perplexity of the future, rose up before her, and steadied her nerves; she knew that she was the stronger of the two, and that if any light was to come out of all this darkness, it would have to be through her initiative.

'Clinton dear!' she said. 'Listen. I cannot be out long, and we must say what we have to say quickly. Don't think me hard or cold if I seem practical—it is only because I am so anxious, so terribly anxious, to think what can be done. Why, Clinton, have you done this?'

'Done it, Phillipa got away? Wouldn't any man have got away if he'd had the chance?' he replied, bitterly. 'It's all very well for you and for Jim Britten to say, "Why did you do it?" You were neither of you in my place.'

'But you had only a few months to wait, Clinton,' she urged. 'Eight months at the most—I kept a careful count, Clinton.'

'Eight months—eight eternities of torture!' he said, between his teeth. 'It's no use, Phillipa. I'm out, thank heaven, and out I'll stop.'

'Who helped you—who managed it?' she asked.

'Warrinder engineered it,' he answered curtly.

'Warrinder! That man? Oh, Clinton!'

Clinton uttered a suppressed exclamation. 'There you are!' he said testily. 'Warrinder's the only living soul that has tried to do anything for me, anyhow!'

'That's unjust, Clinton, and it's not true,' she said. 'I had hoped that when you were free, Clinton, you would never have anything more to do with your old companions,' she added. 'You know, dear, they were not a nice set of men, and I have sometimes wondered whether some of them were not concerned in the affair that brought you to ruin—I have really.'

Clinton uttered a loud snort of disdain.

'What awful rot, Phillipa! The mere idea!' he exclaimed. 'Hang it all, we may have been a lot of silly young asses as regards horses and cards, but we weren't common thieves. No, the real culprit, the scoundrel for whom I've suffered, must be looked for nearer at home than that, my dear!'

'But where, Clinton, and how?' she asked.

'That's more for your father than for me,' he said, resolutely. 'And that's why I must and will see him. I want to put the matter to him quite calmly and quietly—it will be the first time I have ever had the chance of doing it. Sir Robert condemned me in this affair because of the past. It was the old story of the dog with the bad name. And what's more, Phil, you know it.'

And Phillipa, with all her faith in her father, did know it, and she made no direct answer. She pressed Clinton's hand in the darkness to show her sympathy—she herself had never doubted his innocence.

'And if you do see my father, Clinton, what after that?' she asked.

'I'm off to Canada,' he answered. 'Warrinder is going to drive me to Liverpool in his motor—he's hanging about here—and I've got a full kit waiting me there and plenty of money. And, Phil, when I've got fairly settled down there in Canada I want you to come out to me. After all I've gone through you won't leave me alone there, will you, Phil?'

Phillipa's strong will rose to the occasion, and turned her love for her girlhood's sweetheart into the paths of common sense. She took a firm grasp of Clinton's hands.

'Listen, Clinton!' she said. 'We have loved each other since we were children, and I am not conscious of any change in myself. But now you must hear my opinion as a woman, and if you really care for me you will follow

it. I will arrange for you to see my father alone, with ample time to talk to him, tomorrow.'

'I knew you would, Phil!' he murmured.

'And whatever my father or anyone may ever urge to the contrary,' she went on, 'I will always believe in your innocence, and I will eventually marry you—but on one condition only!'

'Well?' said Clinton, half doubtfully. 'And that—'

'That as soon as you have seen my father, and said what you have to say, you go straight back and give yourself up to the authorities. You have only a few months to—to stay there. They will soon pass, and then you will be legally free. Legally free, remember!'

Clinton made no answer.

'Think, Clinton,' she went on. 'Think well. On the one hand is—cowardice and dishonour. On the other hand is—courage. And there is—me.'

He remained silent for some time longer, and when at last he spoke it was only in a whisper.

'Very well. I promise, Phillipa!'

The girl drew his face to hers and kissed him warmly.

'I knew you would, Clinton, I knew you would! Thank heaven! Oh, my poor boy, we shall come through all right yet,' she said. 'Now, listen. Here is my key to the side door which opens into my father's study. Come there tomorrow evening a little after half-past nine—when it is quite dark—let yourself in, and plead your cause with him. And after that—what are you doing, Clinton?'

'Striking a match,' he said. 'I want to see your face again.'

While the faint light lasted these two looked long and earnestly at each other, and Clinton saw tears in the girl's eyes. The match died out.

'I'll keep the promise, Phillipa,' he said, solemnly.

She took his hand in hers with a firm pressure.

'Come,' she said. 'You can walk back with me as far as the gate by the keep.'

Clinton turned away from the wicket-gate near the keep after Phillipa had passed through it and relocked it on the other side, and, after retracing his steps a little way in the direction of the Hermit's Cell, plunged into the wood which led down to the banks of the river and made for a footbridge which spanned the stream at a point well outside the outskirts of the lower village; on that footbridge he had arranged to meet Jim Britten shortly after

ten o'clock. And as he came up to the narrow path which led to it he saw Jim's figure dimly outlined against the sky and the stars.

'That you, Jim?' he whispered.

The figure moved towards him with a warning 'H'sh!' and came close in the gloom.

'Keep quiet, Mr Clinton,' murmured Jim's voice. 'Something's gone wrong!'

'Wrong—how—in what way?' asked Clinton.

'Speak low,' said Jim. 'You know I was late home tonight, and, of course, when I got there you'd gone. It turns out that just after you'd left who should turn up but Illingworth.'

'Illingworth?'

'The police-inspector, Mr Clinton; you remember him, though he's been promoted lately,' replied Jim. 'You mustn't go back up there tonight, Mr Clinton.'

'No,' said Clinton; 'no—that's evident. What's to be done? Look here, Jim,' he continued, suddenly, 'you may as well know what I've arranged. My cousin and I have settled that I'm to see Sir Robert tomorrow night, and say what I have to say to him, and after that—well, I've promised her that I'll go back and serve it out!'

'And the best thing, sir,' said Jim, shaking him by the hand, 'you'll be a proper free man then. Well, then, all we've got to do is to make you dead safe until after tomorrow night. But how and where? Let's think. I have it, sir—Moses Pogmore's!'

Clinton started perceptibly. 'What, Black Moses!' he exclaimed. 'Why there particularly?'

'Why, sir, because, first of all, Black Moses lives all by himself—he can't abide women and won't have 'em near his place; secondly, his cottage is as lonely as ours is; and thirdly, you were always a favourite of his because you went in for horses and dogs and suchlike,' said Jim. 'Black Moses'll let nobody enter while you're there. Come along, Mr Clinton, we'll go and see him.'

Turning away from the footbridge, near which they had lingered during this conversation, Jim led the way along various paths until they came to a disused brickfield, in which a light shone from a cottage window. He posted him in the lee of one of the tumbledown brick-kilns.

‘Stop there, Mr Clinton, while I prepare Moses for your coming,’ he said. ‘I’ve no doubt about your reception, but he might just chance to have some of his mates with him, and I don’t want anybody but him to know about you.’

Clinton waited under the kiln while Jim went warily up to the cottage. There was a chilly wind, and he was tired; also he was not feeling particularly happy. He meant to keep his promise to Phillipa, but the thought of giving himself up and completing the term of his sentence was not attractive to him, especially after that taste of much-desired freedom. He was feeling very bitter and very wrathful against the whole chain of circumstances which had led his life to this point, when Jim Britten reappeared.

‘Come on, sir,’ said Jim. ‘There’s no one there but Moses. I’ve told him, and he’ll see you’re all right.’

Gaining the cottage door in such a fashion that no one could see them cross the lighted window, Jim gently opened it and pushed Clinton in before him. The refugee entered, blinking at the light.

‘Well, Moses,’ he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, ‘you didn’t expect to see me, I’ll bet!’

An enormous man, who had scrupulously cleansed himself of the coal dust and grime of the pit before taking his evening rest, but who was so dark of hair and complexion as fully to justify his mates in calling him Black Moses, rose from a chair on the hearth, and seizing Clinton’s hand wrung it with great heartiness.

‘Mestur Clinton, sir!’ he said. ‘Proud to see ye, sir, proud—and glad—to see ye. No, sir, I didn’t expect to see neither you nor Jim there, but ‘—here he wrung the young man’s hand again and lowered his voice—’ Jim’s telled me what the trouble is, sir, and you can depend on Moses Pogmore, as you’ve give the straight tip to many’s the time, and not oft been wrong. Sit down, sir, and sit you down, Jim; and you shall have a taste of spirits, Mestur Clinton (I know Jim there’s a ‘totaller, and I’ve naught to say agen it), and don’t you be afraid of ’em, for it’s a drop of as good brandy as you could get up at the Castle-I give seven shilling the bottle for it.’

Thus welcomed, Clinton sat down, and was glad to do so; he was glad, too, of the brandy-and-water which the burly giant mixed for him.

‘You’re running a risk in harbouring me, you know, Moses,’ he said. ‘You’d better turn me out—though I know you won’t.’

Moses swore a mighty oath and smacked the table with his open palm. 'No, not for all the laws in the land, sir!' he said. 'Jim, my lad, I don't like a man to come under my roof without suppin'. I'll make thee a sup o' tea or coffee, like—which, now?'

'I'll have a drink of that milk, Moses,' said Jim, pointing to a measure which stood on the table. 'Here's your good health,' he continued, as Moses pushed the milk towards him. 'And now I'll go—I know Mr Clinton's in safe hands.'

'As safe as if he were a baby and in his cradle,' said Moses. 'I'll see to him, Jim, my lad.'

He saw to his charge that night as if he had been entertaining a king, and next morning, in spite of all that Clinton could urge, insisted on 'playing,' saying that the loss of a day's work was no more to him than naught, and that he was going to stand by his guest until night. And so the day went by uneventfully, but in safety, and at the time suggested by Phillipa, Clinton, after a hearty farewell from Moses Pogmore, set out in the dusk for the Castle.

He was conscious as he went along, making his way from one point to another like a hunted thing that dreads even the light of day, that he was feeling heartsick and despondent. He knew very well that he had made a fool of himself in his boyhood and young manhood, that there was no wonder that his uncle had become sick and wearied of his folly and his wild goings on. But he was also conscious of his own entire innocence in the matter for which he had already suffered, and must yet suffer, and a sort of apathy filled him as to the future. Then he thought of Phillipa and her promise, and went forward, strengthened in his resolve, and wishing that he had his time to come over again.

Knowing all the ins and outs of the grounds and gardens about the Castle, Clinton had no difficulty in posting himself in such a position in the shrubbery near the windows of Sir Robert's study that he could see into the room. But in his eagerness to see his uncle and pour out his woes and his entreaties he had arrived too early; he could see that the room was empty.

Then a servant appeared in the study and drew down all the blinds; after that he could see no more.

After waiting what seemed an age, Clinton at last moved out of the shrubbery and crept to the side door, to which Phillipa had provided him with a key. That door opened directly into the study, as he knew well. He in-

serted the key in the lock—it turned without a sound. In another second he was inside the room. A high screen stood between him and the centre of the study, hiding his view of the desk whereat Sir Robert usually worked at night. He moved softly round it, expecting to find the room empty. Everything was so still, so very quiet—so unusually quiet—that it must be empty.

But what was this that he found himself staring at, staring with eyes which grew wider and wider with the certainty of some great horror, of—O heaven! what had befallen that old man, grey-haired, so motionless, fallen forward across his desk, what was this crimson stream running across the white mass of papers beneath him, what was that red-stained thing that—

He turned with a cry for help struggling in his dry throat, only to find it smothered, and himself seized by a tall, stern-faced man, a stranger, and at the same time he saw other faces crowding about him, other voices sounding, crying his name, fingers pointing at him. And Clinton Mannersley suddenly realised with an awful sickening of heart that once more fate was against him, and that he stood there suspected of murder!

# 5
## The Police Court

It was only a sprinkling of men that went down the shaft of Mannersley Main next morning. Those who went were the sort or men whom nothing affects, who are of a stolidity of temperament which cannot be broken down. As for the rest of the population of the new village, it, like the people of the old, man and boy, woman and child, gave itself up without reserve to a discussion of the terrible tragedy of the previous evening. For the news had spread like wildfire, as was inevitable in so small and tightly packed a place, and everybody had known it ere midnight. And it naturally presented itself in a crude and primitive form. Mr Clinton, who got three years' penal servitude for forging his uncle's name a while back, had broken out of prison, and come home, and stabbed poor Sir Robert to the heart in his own study, and if he had not been caught in the very act—well, hands had been laid on him the very minute after it was done! And he was safely locked up, and Sir Robert was dead and gone—forever!

Long before breakfast-time that morning the newly-built courthouse at Mannersley, in which, so far, nothing more serious than a few charges of drunkenness and poaching had been heard, was besieged by a crowd of miners determined to hear what went on when Clinton was brought up before the magistrates. Some of the men, knowing what would happen, had crammed a package of food in their pockets and stationed themselves at the door of the public entrance before daylight. Amongst these was Black Moses, whose stentorian voice could be heard haranguing those about him at intervals as the morning wore away. The theme of his discourse was his profound and intense belief in Clinton's innocence; its invariable conclusion a passionate desire to get at the truth of a mystery which Moses stigmatised in unprintable language.

'Tell ye Master Clinton's as innocent as any bairn i' one o' them cottages,' insisted Black Moses for the hundredth time, holding forth with undiminished ardour as the time drew near for the sitting of the court. 'He

could no more do a foul thing like that there nor our district nurse. Wild and skittish he may ha' been as a lad, but there's a difference between sowing yer wild oats and doing murder! He never did it!'

'He might ha' done it in a temper,' said a voice. 'We're all liable to that there at times.'

'I tell thee he never did it,' vociferated Black Moses, 'and I'll feight thee or any man i' Mannersley as said he did. Wait till all this mystery's over, and some on yer'll see summat.'

Within a moment of the doors being opened the court was packed to its last corner; outside, hundreds waited eagerly to hear what news could be passed to them from the favoured ones within. And as that news came, bit by bit, the friends of the accused man—which means practically the whole crowd—felt their hearts become as lead and their hopes sink lower and lower. For the whole story, as it was told to the countryside magnates who had hastened to fill the bench, seemed so simple, so devoid of anything savouring of the mysterious! It was just a plain, straightforward story, sordid, brutal, horrible—but, above all, on the face of it, a story which seemed impossible of contradiction.

To Sir Clinton Mannersley, sitting closely guarded in the dock, the whole thing seemed like a horrible nightmare. Although he had never closed his eyes since the event which was still hovering in dreadful scarlet and black before them, he was so wide awake as to believe himself in a dream or a trance or gone out of his senses, and he kept pinching himself mechanically, as if to ascertain whether he had any feeling left. He stared with astonishment at a young solicitor—with whom he had had many a lark in boyish days, recent enough—who was glibly setting forth the case against him. He heard all Rowland Parke said as if Rowland Parke was a puppet gifted with miraculous powers of speech.

'And as your Worships well know,' Mr Parke was saying, 'it is the usual practise in these cases merely to give evidence of arrest, and then to ask for an adjournment. But in this case, as I shall hope to show to your Worships, there are two reasons why I should bring before you the case in full—at any rate, as it presents itself now. The first is that we have sufficient and most full evidence to show why your Worships should, without further delay, commit the prisoner, who is now, by what is alleged to be his own dastardly act, Sir Clinton Mannersley, for trial; the second that we believe it may allay a certain feeling of suspicion in this immediate district that he is a

deeply-wronged man. Into that question I need not go—it is a fact, well known to all of us, that there is a distinct belief in this village that he is such a man, and it will be well to show to those who hold it that he is not.'

'Now, briefly, your Worships, the facts are these: The prisoner nearly three years ago was found guilty, at Clothford Assizes, of forgery, and was sentenced to three years' penal servitude. A fortnight ago he escaped from Dartmoor. I shall show you that he made his way here; that he came here with a grievance against his uncle, our late greatly-respected friend, Sir Robert Mannersley; that he was heard to express sentiments which, in view of what has happened, can only be taken as direct threats; that he lurked about the place, and was harboured by people who should have known better; and that, after hiding in the shrubberies of the Castle last night for nearly an hour, he effected an entrance to Sir Robert's study, and was all but caught in the very act which we say he committed. Clearer evidence than that which I shall give you has, I venture to say, never been put before a bench of magistrates. Call Inspector Illingworth.'

The police-inspector, consequential, and proud because of his recent promotion, looked round the court, during the initial processes of the witness-box, with calm dignity.

'Inspector Illingworth, you were hastily telephoned for last night from the Castle about half-past nine?'

'I was.'

'You went there at once?'

'I did.'

'On arriving there what did you find—what did you see?'

The inspector squared himself. 'On arriving I found the household in a state of confusion. I was shown at once into the late Sir Robert's study. There I found Dr Childe, Mr Quinton, Mr Stead, Mr Dauncey, the butler, and the prisoner, Sir Clinton. I saw the body of the late Sir Robert.'

'Where was that body?'

'It was lying across a writing-desk. There was a curious-looking, a sort of foreign-looking, knife, or dagger, on the desk.'

'Dr Childe told you that Sir Robert was dead?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And in consequence of what Mr Quinton told you, you took the prisoner into custody?'

'I did.'

‘Did he say anything?’

‘He seemed dazed. He muttered something about “conspiracy.” Otherwise he said nothing.’

‘Now, I want to ask you a further question, inspector. You are aware, of course, that the prisoner was sentenced to three years’ penal servitude rather more than two years ago, and that he has recently made his escape from Dartmoor?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘When did you hear of that?’

‘Well, at once, but I kept the knowledge to myself, for certain reasons.’

‘We will leave those reasons at present. You have had for some days a knowledge that he was in this neighbourhood?’

‘For three days.’

‘How did you obtain that knowledge?’

‘From a man named Lione Moore, a miner.’

‘And from his information you made certain observations and inquiries with regard to the prisoner’s whereabouts?’

‘Yes.’

‘They were only partly successful?’

‘Only partly; I could not lay hands on him until too late.’

‘That will do, inspector. Call Lione Moore.’

The prisoner looked inquisitively and with fascinated expectation at the man who entered the witness-box. He was a little, wizened man, with ferret-like eyes and a sharp nose, and his face was much blackened with the obvious results of some explosion of bygone years. He was the most unconcerned man in the court, and placidly chewed a length of straw.

‘You are Lione Moore, residing in Europa Street, Mannersley, and you are a coal miner?’ began the prosecuting solicitor.

‘I’m Lione Moore, and I am a coal miner—when there’s naught better to do,’ answered the witness, nonchalantly.

‘Three nights ago, at midnight, you were at Dead Man’s Cross, in the woods?’

‘That’s right, guv’nor, I was.’

‘What were you doing there?’ suddenly interpolated one of the magistrates, upon whose land Dead Man’s Cross was situate.

The witness looked archly at the solicitor, and the latter cast a glance of meaning at the Bench.

‘I think, your Lordships, that we need scarcely go into the question of why the witness was at that particular portion of the globe at that particular hour,’ he said, dryly. ‘You were there, Moore?’

‘I’ve said I were,’ replied the witness.

‘And you were hidden behind a tree where the roads meet?’

‘Aye!’

‘Something happened—something unusual?’

‘Very unusual, I should say,’ replied Moore.

‘Tell the court in your own way what it was.’

‘Well, it were this here. It were what I call a half moon-lit night; you could see nicely—’

‘Nicely enough to poach one of my hares, I’ll be bound,’ said, half-audibly, the magistrate who had previously interrupted.

‘And from where I were, which was behind that there high hedge at Dead Man’s Cross, I could see straight down the road as comes from Stelford—the high road,’ continued the witness. ‘A motorcarriage come along and stops. There were two men in it. One on ’em gets out. I heard him speak, and I knew it were Mr Clinton there.’

‘How did you know he was Mr Clinton?’

‘Cause I heard his voice.’

‘You had often heard his voice before?’

‘Aye, many a hundred times!’

‘What happened then?’

‘What happened then,’ continued Moore, glancing at the prisoner, ‘was that Mr Clinton and the chap what was in the motor talked a bit, in a sort o’ whispering, you’ll understand, and then Mr Clinton turns in my direction. The other chap says, Well, goodbye, then, and stand up to him, Mannersley; and Mr Clinton says, have it out with him, no fear, Warriner, or some such name. Then the other chap set off northwards, and Mr Clinton he turned into the wood.’

‘You followed him along the path through the wood?’

‘Yes, I did. All the same, I knew where he’d make for, and I followed him there.’

‘Where was that?’

‘Why, to Jim Britten’s cottage! ’Cause Jim’s his foster-brother, d’ye see?’

‘You saw the prisoner enter James Britten’s cottage?’

‘I did, and, what’s more, I heard him and Jim talking inside, though, of course, I couldn’t make out what was said. And I should have kept a watch on that cottage, ’cause I know very well as Mr Clinton’s time wasn’t up, and that he’d broken out, only I went home to get a bit of a sleep and something to eat, and I overslept myself, and it was late in the afternoon when I told the inspector what I’d seen, and he gave me a rare pitching-in-to, for not telling him sooner. Howsomever, I kept an eye on Jim Britten.’

‘You mean you watched Britten’s movements?’

‘Yes. ’Cause I knew something was up.’

‘Well, what did you see of Britten with relation to this case?’

‘Why, at breaking-off time, instead of going home as he generally does, Britten he went up the Castle way and meets his sweetheart, that lass of Riley’s as is Miss Phillipa’s maid, and I see him give her a letter—leastways, what looked like one. They talked for a bit, just there by that little gate as opens into the Castle grounds, and she went in, and Jim went away homewards.’

‘What is the relevancy of this particular piece of evidence?’ asked the chairman.

‘That, your Worship, I shall proceed to show in due course,’ answered Mr Parke. ‘You can stand down, Moore. Your Worships, I now—’

At this juncture some commotion was caused at the rear of the court by the entrance of two men, one of whom was immediately recognised by some of the magistrates and functionaries as Mr Miller Stanford, a leading criminal barrister of that circuit; the other as a local solicitor. Stanford forced his way to the table.

‘Your Worships,’ he said, ‘I crave pardon for what may seem an interruption, but I have only just been instructed on behalf of the prisoner. I understand that the hearing has scarcely begun, but that your Worships have decided to hear the evidence which the prosecution will offer?’

Rowland Parke, waiting with obvious impatience until the chairman had answered Stanford’s question in the affirmative, turned to the usher.

‘Call Mr Mark Quinton.’

# 6
## Find the Right Man!

It was already well known to those who packed the court to its last inch of standing room that Quinton had actually apprehended Sir Clinton Mannersley in the murdered man's room, and there was a buzz of expectation as he made his way into the witness-box. There was no one present to whom he was not known, nor was there anyone there who did not marvel at his appearance. The usually vigorous, forceful, self-assertive man, a picture of health at all times, looked as if he had gone through some terrible shock. His face was white and drawn, there were heavy circles about his eyes; the eyes looked as if they could not shut out some appalling sight. And though men knew that the manager had seen, only a few hours before, one of the most awful scenes on which human eyes can look, they wondered, knowing him for a man of iron nerve, that it should have had such a grave effect upon him.

'You are Mark Valentine Quinton, and for about two years have been manager of Mannersley Main Colliery?' began Parke.

'Yes.'

'You were on intimate terms—I mean of a friendly and social nature—with the late Sir Robert?'

'I was.'

'And visited a great deal at the Castle?'

'A great deal.'

'In fact, I may take it that you had the run of the house?'

'Yes.'

'You paid a visit there last night. Tell the court what took place as regards that.'

'I had occasion to see Sir Robert last night. I went up to the Castle about twenty minutes past nine. Dauncey, the butler, who admitted me, told me that Sir Robert was in his study. I was going there, but on my way met Miss Mannersley, who invited me to look at some water-colour drawings which

her father had recently purchased in London and had arrived yesterday. I went with her to the drawing room to see them, and was there perhaps twenty minutes, perhaps a little longer. Then I went to Sir Robert's study.'

'Now, here is a rough sketch or plan of the study,' said Parke. 'Look at it. There are three entrances marked there. Please explain them to their Worships.'

Quinton pointed with his forefinger to the large sheet of paper which an attendant held up. 'The study,' he said, 'is built at an angle of the house. It has a large bow-window facing the lawn. The door on the left hand—that is, regarding the interior of the room from the window—opens into the library. That at the rear opens upon the corridor, which runs the whole length of the ground floor. The door on the right hand opens into the garden—the grounds. A large screen stands before it. The desk which Sir Robert used stands between this screen and the door on the left.'

'From which door did you enter last night?'

'I entered from the corridor.'

'What did you see?'

Quinton's eyes contracted, and he frowned slightly. 'Immediately on entering the room I saw Sir Robert, lying across his desk, motionless. I saw blood on the papers on the desk. By the screen was a young man, who was retreating backwards from the room. I had never seen him before. I seized him instantly, and as I did so I noticed that there was blood on his right hand and on the white cuff of his shirt.'

'You did not know him?'

'I certainly did not know him.'

'You called for help?'

'Yes, and Dauncey almost immediately came, with a footman, and Mr Marshall Stead, who had just entered the house. Dauncey, at sight of the young man, exclaimed "Mr Clinton!" Then I knew who it was I had seized.'

'The prisoner in the dock is the man you laid hands on?'

'Oh, yes!'

Rowland Parke sat down, and Stanford rose. It was a sort of household proverb in that part of the country that Stanford had got more men off than any barrister living, and the pitmen at the back of the court craned their necks.

'Mr Quinton,' began Stanford, taking off his glasses and speaking in his usual easy fashion, 'you told the Court, I think, that when you first saw the

prisoner he was near the screen, retreating backwards?'

'I did.'

'What was his exact position—was he retreating upon the screen, or at the side of the screen, or what?'

'He was retreating in the direction of the screen. A step or two more and he would have hit upon it.'

'Oh! Whereabouts would he have hit upon it?'

'Full in the centre.'

'In the centre. How did the prisoner's attitude strike you?'

Quinton did not appear to comprehend the question.

'I say how did his attitude strike you?' repeated Stanford. 'Was it that of a guilty man?'

'I did not consider it at the time.'

'Ah! Or was it that of a man who had suddenly, without the slightest expectation of doing so, come upon a horrible sight, and was shrinking from it?'

'I did not consider that either,' said Quinton, slowly.

'Nevertheless, you have described the latter attitude very well,' continued Stanford, in his direct manner. 'You are sure, at any rate, that he was retreating backwards upon the centre of the screen?'

'I am certain.'

'Did you think he was going to penetrate the screen, then, in his effort to reach the door?'

'I thought nothing.'

'At any rate, he was not making the best of any opportunity to escape?'

'No, that is so.'

'And yet, instead of slowly retreating backwards upon this screen, he could surely have made a precipitate flight by the door which opens upon the garden?'

'I suppose he could.'

'You came to the conclusion,' continued Stanford, toying with his glasses, 'that this man whom you caught was the actual murderer of Sir Robert Mannersley?'

Quinton fingered his moustache nervously. 'I don't see what other conclusion I could come to,' he answered. 'I saw Sir Robert lying across his desk, I saw the knife, I saw this man—'

‘And you jumped to a conclusion. That will do, thank you,’ said Stanford, and sat down, while Quinton left the box, obviously perplexed.

The next witness was Dauncey, the butler, who corroborated the evidence given by the police-inspector and Quinton as to the finding of Clinton Mannersley in proximity to the dead man’s body. And then came a dramatic incident which caused great excitement in the crowded court. For Rowland Parke produced the weapon which had been used by the assassin—a dagger, two edged, of Eastern workmanship, the delicate arabesque on the blade stained with the victim’s blood.

‘You saw this dagger, or knife, lying on your master’s desk?’ asked Parke.

‘I did, sir,’ replied the old butler, sorrowfully.

‘You know all about it—what it was used for?’

‘Quite well, sir. Its place was on a table which stands between my poor master’s desk and the screen, a table on which we used to lay out the reviews and magazines that Sir Robert took in.’

‘It was used as a paper knife, then?’

‘Yes, sir; and I always considered it dangerous, because it was very sharp and pointed, as you can see, sir.’

‘Now, from the position of that table, it would have been an easy thing for anybody entering by the garden door behind Sir Robert to have picked up that knife and plunged it into his body?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Sir Robert was, I believe, rather deaf?’

‘He was, sir, and lately he had been getting worse.’

‘Stand down for a moment, Mr Dauncey. Call Sergeant Johnson, if you please.’

‘Sergeant Johnson, by instructions, when the prisoner was brought to the police station, you searched him?’

‘I did, sir.’

‘What did you find upon him?’

‘I found a purse containing nine pounds, seven shillings, and threepence; a silver cigarette-case, a silver matchbox, a penknife, a silver pencil-case, a copy of *Ruff’s Guide to the Turf*, a gold watch and chain, and a key.’

‘Is this the key?’

‘That is the key, sir.’

‘That will do, Johnson. Call Mr Dauncey again.’

‘Mr Dauncey, do you recognise this key?’

‘Yes, sir; quite well.’

‘What key is it?’

‘It is one of two keys made for the garden door in my late master’s study, sir.’

‘Who carried the keys?’

‘Sir Robert carried one, sir; Miss Phillipa carried the other.’

‘Can you say positively which of the two keys this is?’

‘Yes, sir, it is Miss Phillipa’s. My master’s key was—was on his body,’ answered the old butler.

Rowland Parke turned to the Bench. ‘I am as anxious as any man can be to keep Miss Mannersley’s name out of the case, your Worships,’ he said, ‘but I shall be obliged to call her at a later stage to give evidence as regards the question of this key. We must know how it came into the prisoner’s possession, and—’

Clinton Mannersley, whose apathy had by this time left him, started up from his seat in the dock.

‘I can tell you that now!’ he exclaimed. ‘There’s no need to drag my cousin into this beastly place and rotten business, and—’

But Stanford had turned round and whispered a word, and the prisoner nodded his head sullenly and reseated himself.

‘In the meantime,’ continued Parke, ‘there are one or two matters which I wish to elicit from the present witness before he leaves the box. Mr Dauncey, could the prisoner have gained access to the house except by the private door of the study—the garden door?’

‘No, sir.’

‘And he, of course, had not been admitted at the hall door?’

‘Certainly not, sir.’

‘You know who was admitted last night?’

‘Yes, sir, because I was reading the newspaper in my chair in the wine hall from a quarter to nine to the time that—that this happened, sir.’

‘Who was admitted during that time?’

‘Nobody, sir, but Mr Quinton, at about half-past nine, and Mr Stead, who came just before we heard Mr Quinton call for help.’

‘Very well. Now, a final answer from you. You have known the prisoner from boyhood?’

‘Yes, sir, and been very fond of him,’ said Dauncey, with a troubled glance at the dock.

‘Is it not a fact that he and the late Sir Robert Mannersley did not get on well—that they were on bad terms?’

‘They didn’t agree, sir,’ replied the butler, reluctantly.

‘The prisoner was always of a hot temper, wasn’t he?’

‘He was quick-tempered, sir.’

‘Apt to fly into sudden rage, eh?’

‘At times, sir—if he was provoked.’

‘Did he not on one occasion, and, I believe, in your presence commit a savage assault on a pageboy, and half beat him to death with a hunting-crop?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied Dauncey, ‘and the lad richly deserved all he got!’

Rowland Parke sat down, quite unconcerned by the ripple of laughter, and Stanford rose.

‘I suppose, Mr Dauncey, that you have an opinion of your own about this case?’ he said.

The old butler shook his head dolefully. ‘I’m fairly amazed by it, sir,’ he said. ‘But’—and here he held up his head and looked defiantly all round him—‘but I’m sure of this—there’s nothing and nobody going to make me believe that Mr—I beg pardon—that Sir Clinton killed my poor master. No, sir, no—a thousand times no! He was a wild boy, but he wasn’t a bad ’un!’

The applause from the back of the court showed where popular opinion held, and Moses Pogmore’s voice made itself heard.

‘That’s reight, owd lad, that’s reight! Let ’em find t’ real murderer—Mr Clinton never did it!’

Rowland Parke was on his legs again when order had been restored. He spoke in subdued accents as he turned to the Bench.

‘I am sorry, your Worships, to have to take this course, but I have no option. Call Miss Phillipa Mannersley.’

A great hush fell on the court as a door opened and Mark Quinton appeared, leading in the dead man’s daughter.

# 7
## The Key

Of all the people present in court, Clinton Mannersley was most affected by Phillipa's entrance. But while the rest, from magistrates to pitmen, were one and all full of pity and solicitude for the bereaved girl, who had always been a great favourite in the village, Clinton's concern was of a different nature. He was observant and keen-eyed, and something in Mark Quinton's attitude towards Phillipa, as he led her forward, showed him that the manager was in love with her. And from that moment half his interest and concern in his own critical position left him; he was facing the fact that he had a rival who might be dangerous.

There was a dead silence as Phillipa stepped into the box and raised her veil, and a murmur of sympathy arose amongst the pitmen as they saw that her usually smiling and rosy face was pale and drawn. Rowland Parke dropped the sharp, self-assured manner in which he had examined the other witnesses, and addressed her in soft tones.

'I am deeply regretful, Miss Mannersley, to be obliged to bring you here, but it has been unavoidable, and I will not detain you any longer than I can help. Will you kindly look at this key and tell me if it is yours?'

'It is mine,' replied Phillipa.

'This key was found in the—in Sir Clinton's possession last night. Can you tell us how it came into his possession?'

'Yes. I gave it to him.'

'When was that?'

'The night before last.'

'May I ask for what purpose?'

'I gave him the key in order that he might gain access into my father's study last night.'

'Then I take it that you had had an interview with your cousin—night before last?'

'Yes.'

Rowland Parke hesitated for a moment, as if he were not quite assured of his next question, and in the silence Clinton called across the court to his cousin.

'Tell them everything, Phillipa—there's no need to keep anything back now!'

Phillipa looked at Parke. 'That is what I should wish to do,' she said, quietly. 'There is really nothing to conceal, and perhaps—'

She paused and hesitated. Stanford jumped to his feet.

'I am sure that if Miss Mannersley is good enough to offer any evidence which she feels she would like to offer, your Worships and my friend will gladly hear it,' he said, in his suavest tones.

'Certainly—certainly!' murmured the chairman.

'I should like to say what I know,' said Phillipa, as Stanford sat down again, 'because I—I hope it will be found in my cousin's favour. It is only a few days ago that I heard that my cousin had—had made his escape, and that he was coming to Mannersley. I was made aware of his arrival, and I consented to meet him the night before last at the Hermit's Cell. We met, and he explained to me that he desired an interview with my father for the purpose of strongly urging him to reopen the case of nearly three years ago. We knew that my father would not receive him in the ordinary way, so I arranged with him that he should enter the study by the garden door next evening at an hour when my father was always alone there. That was why I gave him the key—so that he could admit himself. I think it right that you should also know,' concluded Phillipa, with a glance at Clinton, 'that my cousin gave me his solemn promise that, after the interview with my father, he would at once give himself up to the authorities from which he had escaped.'

There was a ripple of comment and applause at this. As Rowland Parke had evidently no further questions to ask, Stanford rose and turned to the witness-box.

'Although you had made or suggested the arrangement, Miss Mannersley, you never actually knew if your cousin was in the house?'

'No, I never knew.'

'What time was he to enter the study by the garden door?'

'About half-past nine—the time my father was usually there.'

'We have heard from Mr Quinton that he called at the Castle about twenty minutes past nine, and was on his way to the study when you met him

and asked him to look at some pictures?'

Phillipa nodded her head. 'Yes,' she said composedly, 'I did that on purpose. I did not want anybody to interrupt the interview between my father and my cousin.'

Stanford sat down and helped himself to a pinch of snuff. He glared at Parke, who rose as if in some uncertainty.

'I have nothing more to ask Miss Mannersley,' he said.

Phillipa left the box, once more assisted by Quinton. But instead of leaving the court she made a whispered remark to the manager, and a seat was immediately found for her near the solicitors' table. Parke went on speaking.

'… nor do I see that there is any necessity to do more now than ask your Worships to commit the prisoner,' he continued. 'As I said at the commencement of these proceedings there is abundant evidence to justify you in such a course, especially as the Assizes begin at Stelford in a fortnight, and the case can come into the list. I therefore ask your Worships to commit the prisoner for trial on the charge preferred against him.'

Stanford rose slowly from his seat, and, taking off his spectacles, began to wave them in the characteristic fashion so well known. He favoured Rowland Parke with a humorous glance which made that brilliant young gentleman think somehow of a cat playing with a mouse.

'I am sure your Worships will agree with me that my friend is an admirable and a praiseworthy specimen of the go-aheadness of our present age,' he said, with a twinkle in his eye, 'and he is certainly destined, if he perseveres in his courses, to be an exponent of time-saving methods. But before your Worships consider his application, I must crave to put before your Worships some evidence which seems to me to be very material to this case, and may alter its complexion very considerably. And having offered that evidence, I shall oppose Mr Parke's application, and shall ask for an adjournment. Call Walter Fisher.'

A young, alert-looking man, trim, clean-shaven, stepped into the witness-box.

'You are a footman at the Castle?' asked Stanford.

'I am, sir.'

'How long have you been there?'

'Three and a half years, sir.'

‘It has been your duty, whenever Sir Robert was at home, to take into his study at precisely half-past nine a tray on which was a decanter of whisky, a syphon of mineral water, and a glass?’

‘It has, sir.’

‘Did you do this last night?’

‘I did, sir.’

‘To the exact minute?’

‘To the very minute, sir, by the great clock in the inner hall.’

‘Was Sir Robert in his study?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘What was he doing?’

‘Writing at his desk, sir.’

‘Nothing unusual about him?’

‘Nothing, sir.’

‘What did you do after that?’

‘I went back to the inner hall, sir.’

‘Had Mr Quinton arrived then?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Where was he?’

‘He had gone into the drawing room with Miss Mannersley, sir.’

‘Between that time and the time when Mr Quinton raised the alarm was anyone else admitted to the house?’

‘Yes, sir—Mr Stead.’

‘What time was that?’

‘Exactly twenty minutes to ten, sir.’

‘What occurred as regards Mr Stead?’

‘Mr Dauncey told Mr Stead that Mr Quinton was just going to see Sir Robert, sir, and Mr Stead said he would wait in the library.’

‘Did he go into the library?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Is the library next door to the study?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And there is a communicating door between them?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Now, you heard Mr Quinton raise the alarm?’

‘I did, sir.’

‘What time was that?’

‘I should say, sir, as near as possible it was about ten minutes to ten.’

‘That would be ten minutes after Mr Stead’s arrival?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘That will do, Fisher. Call Dr Whittaker Childe.’

The doctor, a middle-aged man who was well known in the district as a physician and surgeon of great reputation, and who was much noted for the punctilious care which he gave to all his cases, stepped into the box.

‘I believe that your residence adjoins the Castle?’ began Stanford.

‘Yes.’

‘How long would it take you to walk hurriedly from your surgery into the study at the Castle?’

‘A minute and a half.’

‘You were in your surgery about ten minutes to ten last night, and you received a telephone message asking you to hurry to the Castle?’

‘Yes.’

‘You went at once, and would therefore be in the study within the next two or three minutes at the outside?’

‘I was certainly there before five minutes to ten.’

‘You saw and examined Sir Robert’s body at once?’

‘I did.’

‘You ascertained the cause of death?’

‘Yes. He had been stabbed through the heart by a blow directed from behind.’

‘I understand, Dr Childe, that you have a great reputation for accuracy. I want to put a question to you to which you cannot give too accurate an answer. How long did you consider Sir Robert to have been dead?’

Dr Childe’s answer came with a snap. ‘Eight minutes.’

‘Eight minutes! You can give your opinion as nearly as that?’

‘Certainly. He had been dead not less than eight or not more than nine minutes.’

‘That is to say, if you saw him at nine-fifty-four, he had been stabbed about or at nine-forty-six?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you consider that death was instantaneous?’

‘Yes; that is, what is called instantaneous.’

‘Which means—’

‘Which means what we realise by instantaneous,’ said Dr Childe, with a smile. ‘You may take it that it was—instantaneous.’

‘Very good. Now, I want another of your careful scientific answers to a critical question. When the blow was struck, what would the physical result on Sir Robert be?’

‘You mean—would the blow cause any action of his body?’

‘That is my meaning, doctor.’

‘Yes,’ replied Dr Childe, ‘it would, and it did.’

‘We are told that he was found fallen forwards across his desk. Does that mean that when he was stabbed he simply collapsed over the desk, and maintained his sitting position?’

‘No, certainly not. What I am sure occurred was this, and I base this on careful observation of the position of the body. When Sir Robert was struck he leaped to his feet, tottered a moment, and then fell face forward across the desk. He was a tall man, and the desk is an especially wide one, otherwise he would have slipped off it.’

‘Thank you. Now a question or two more. Would any sound arise from Sir Robert when that blow was struck?’

‘Almost certainly. He would utter a groan.’

‘A loud groan?’

‘A very loud groan.’

‘Loud enough to be heard in the next room?’

‘Unless the walls were exceptionally thick—yes.’

‘You know the relative position of the study and library in this case. Should such a groan have been heard in the library?’

‘In my opinion—yes.’

‘That is, supposing it were uttered?’

‘It is, as I have said, morally certain that it would be uttered.’

‘Thank you, doctor—that is all,’ said Stanford. He turned to the Bench. ‘I think your Worships will agree that we have heard some deeply interesting evidence,’ he said. ‘Now, I want to hear what is to be said on this matter by the man who was in the next room! Call Mr Marshall Stead.’

# 8
## THE VOICE

The man whose name had just been pronounced by Stanford rose slowly from a seat which he had occupied all the morning in the well of the court, almost under the dock, and made his way to the witness-box amidst a murmur of excitement from the spectators. Although there was not a single person there who was not as well acquainted with him as with the great wheels of the colliery just outside, they looked at him with a new and absorbing interest, as if they had never seen him before. According to the evidence which they had heard, this man had actually been within a few yards—a few feet—of the victim at the time the fatal blow was dealt; while he had waited there in the library, his employer had been done to death in the study. It was almost as if the crime had been enacted under his very eyes. There was accordingly a strange and weird fascination about him, and as he faced Miller Stanford everything but his presence was forgotten.

The man himself was perhaps the coolest person present—not even excepting the practised barrister, who was feeling the excitement of the fray. He was not a man of remarkable appearance—rather, he was of a type so familiar in great commercial centres as to pass unnoticed; the type of the highly-respectable, conventional clerk, quiet and reserved in manner, the type which one associates with banks and countinghouses and mercantile offices. He was quietly and unostentatiously, but at the same time fashionably dressed in dark clothes; out of respect for the dead man he had assumed a black cravat; he wore black gloves. As he stood in the witness-box he made a sombre picture—a picture of black and white, of light and shade. Everything about him was of a consistent neatness; his smooth, dark hair, his carefully-trimmed moustache, and his glossy linen. And his face was as quiet as himself; his entire attitude and appearance suggested an infinite composure.

'Mr Stead,' began Stanford, 'you are chief cashier of the Mannersley Main Colliery?'

‘I am.’

‘That, I suppose, means that you are really at the head of the financial matters?’

‘Under the proprietor—yes.’

‘How long have you held that post?’

‘Five years.’

‘And what was your previous position?’

‘I have held every position in the cashier’s department, after entering it ten years ago—from an ordinary clerkship to the chief cashiership.’

‘And previous to that?’

‘I was a booking-clerk on the Stelford and Lanchester Railway, and stationed here.’

‘You naturally enjoyed the late Sir Robert’s confidence, seeing that you held a position of such great trust and responsibility?’

‘I believe I enjoyed the late Sir Robert’s full confidence in every way.’

‘You occasionally called at the Castle?’

‘I constantly called at the Castle. I called regularly.’

‘As a visitor, or on business, or what?’

‘In both respects. Sir Robert sometimes asked me to dine. I constantly called to see him in the evening on business matters.’

‘You went there last night—at twenty minutes to ten?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you were shown into the library?’

‘I was.’

‘And remained there until you heard Mr Quinton call for help?’

‘Yes.’

‘When you entered the study?’

‘That is so.’

‘You went into the study, of course, through the door which communicates with the library?’

‘I did.’

‘Had that door been closed all the time you were in the library?’

‘I concluded that it had from the fact that it was certainly closed when I went to Mr Quinton’s assistance.’

‘You have heard the evidence which has been put before the court to the effect that you were in the library from nine-forty to nine-fifty. Is that correct?’

‘I have no reason to dispute it. I should say it is quite correct.’

‘You have also heard Dr Childe affirm positively that Sir Robert must have been murdered at or about nine-forty-six, and that there must almost certainly—we may take it as certainly—have been two sounds—one, the fall of the body; the other a loud groan. Did you, who were in the next room, a silent apartment, mind, where there was no noise or any sound to disturb you, hear anything of either?’

Everybody in court regarded Marshall Stead eagerly as this question was put to him. He answered it as coolly as he had answered all the others.

‘I heard nothing.’

‘Absolutely nothing?’

‘Absolutely nothing.’

Stanford paused for a moment and seemed to be reflecting. He presently went on:

‘You know the interior arrangements of the Castle well?’

‘Very well indeed, as regards the lower rooms, the reception rooms.’

‘Don’t you think it a strange thing that you should have heard nothing in the library of what was going on in the next room?’

‘I should think it a strange thing that heard nothing if the murder actually happened during the ten minutes I was waiting there. In fact, such a possibility is to me inconceivable.’

‘But you have heard Dr Childes testimony.’ Marshall Stead made no reply.

‘From your knowledge of the house can you say if the walls between the study and the library are very thick, and if the door is a very close-fitting one?’

‘Yes, I can. That has struck me while this matter has been under discussion. The library and study are in the oldest part of the house—the part which projects into the grounds—and the walls are of very old masonry and very thick indeed. The door is deeply inset in that between the library and study.’

‘But it is otherwise an ordinary, well-fitting door?’

‘So far as I know—yes.’

‘And of course it has a keyhole, and will not fit like a glove at the bottom?’

‘I have never examined it, though I have passed through it hundreds of times.’

The chairman interposed. ‘Don’t you think, Mr Stanford, that it would be an easy thing to make some experiments on this question?’ he said. ‘It would surely be possible to ascertain definitely if such sounds as those spoken of by Dr Childe could be heard from the study to the library.’

‘I am much obliged to your Worship for the suggestion,’ said Stanford. ‘It is one which I was about to make. Thank you, Mr Stead—that is all I have to ask you. Your Worships, I have to ask you to give me an opportunity of consulting with my client and his solicitor. If your Worships would adjourn for ten minutes—’

‘We will adjourn for half an hour,’ said the chairman.

Stanford, the solicitor, and Clinton Mannersley, who was closely guarded by several officers, disappeared into the lower regions of the police court; the magistrates retired into their private room. But nobody else left the court, and the long-pent-up excitement vented itself in comment and discussion. It seemed as if everybody began to talk at once, and Quinton, who had remained near Phillipa, bent down to her.

‘Won’t all this noise be too much for you?’ he said. ‘Hadn’t better take you out?’

‘No, thank you,’ she said, wearily. ‘I want to hear the magistrates’ decision. Do you see the man who has just come in there, Mr Quinton?—the man who is talking to Mr Illingworth?’

Quinton glanced across the court, and saw the man she indicated. He was a little, soberly-dressed man, middle-aged, and having pretty much the appearance of an undertaker, seeing that everything about him was very decorous and solemn—from the top of his bald head to the points of his well-polished boots. He carried an old-fashioned silk hat—very wide in the brim and very high in the crown—in one hand, and an equally old-fashioned umbrella in the other, and was altogether something of an oddity. But what Quinton most remarked about him was that his clean-shaven face was literally one mass of curious wrinkles—there were wrinkles about his eyes, his mouth, his chin—there were wrinkles everywhere. And out of all these wrinkles, from beneath a pair of bushy grey eyebrows, peeped out a pair of eyes as black as coal, and as sharp and penetrating as a ferret’s.

‘Yes,’ said Quinton, ‘I see him. A quaint, interesting figure, isn’t he? Do you know him, Miss Mannersley?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, still watching the little man. ‘He is a famous Scotland Yard detective—Inspector Cortelyou. It was he who took charge of

the case when some of my jewellery was stolen from our town house last summer, and who traced the thieves. He is very clever and very interesting. Do you think he can have come down about—about this, Mr Quinton?'

'I should say so,' replied Quinton. 'And—'

He was interrupted at that point by the return of Stanford and the solicitor for the defence, and presently the magistrates came back into court, and Clinton was brought back to the dock. Stanford at once rose.

'During the last few minutes, your Worships,' he said, 'I have had a short conversation with my client, and, in consequence of what he has said, I am going to take a very unusual course, but a course which I feel absolutely justified in taking. After what you have heard it must be evident that this case must be adjourned for expert evidence on certain obvious points. But the prisoner is anxious—painfully anxious—to make a statement to you from the dock, and though it is more usual for legal advisers in these circumstances to counsel their clients to say nothing, I think it well to let mine speak. That is, of course, with your Worships' permission.'

The chairman, after a whispered consultation with his colleagues, bowed his head in token of assent.

'Very good, Mr Stanford,' he said.

Clinton, resting his hands on the front of the dock, looked at Phillipa. He held up his head after that look, and faced the magistrates with something of pride.

'Look here,' he said, with a species of boyish simplicity that carried him still further into the affections of the crowd, 'I'm nothing of a speaker, as most of you know, but I can tell the truth in a plain way. Well, the truth's this, as far as I'm concerned. I made my escape from Dartmoor for two reasons. The first was that I should have been a fool if I hadn't when I had the chance I had. And I could have been in America or Canada now but for the second reason—I wanted to see my uncle. I wanted to beg of him, to pray of him, to reopen that beastly business of nearly three years ago—you all know what I mean. I wanted to convince him of the truth of my innocence of that. I'll acknowledge that I felt hard about his treatment of me. Just because I'd been a bit rackety at Eton and Cambridge, and had got into an awful hole in the way of debt, he seemed to think that I was an out-and-out rotter, whereas, really, I'm not, if you only knew me—I was only a bit—well, you know—and I always meant to shake down into a real steady-going sort—I did indeed! Well, when I got here, the other day, I managed to see

my cousin, and what she told you in her evidence is true, of course. Now, I hid in the shrubbery in the Castle garden last night, right opposite the private door, until I thought my uncle would be in the study and alone. I knew the habits of the house, you know. Well, at last I opened the door and went in. Of course, I couldn't see into the room at first, because of the screen. It all seemed strangely silent. When I stepped round the screen I saw—well, what I never expected to see. I must have turned faint, or sick, or something, because my recollections are not very clear on this point. But I do remember that I went up to—to him, and touched him, and I felt he was dead, and just dead! That was how I got the—the blood on my shirt cuff and my sleeve that Mr Quinton spoke of. You see, I hadn't noticed it. And I shrank back, feeling as if I was going to drop—and that was when Quinton entered from the corridor and collared me. And that's the truth—and I can't say any more. But it is the truth!'

With another glance at Phillipa, who had listened to him with parted lips and eager eyes, Clinton stepped back amidst a murmur of applause from the pitmen which nothing could stop. And suddenly from amongst them, rising high above their clamour, came a stentorian voice, which forced itself upon everybody:

'Aye, lad, it is the truth; it's the real truth! And I can prove it!'

# 9

## Remanded

In the very thick of the closely-packed mass of pitmen at the back of the court a man had risen and was endeavouring to attract the attention of the bench by violent gesticulation. He was a tall, loosely-built fellow of apparently twenty-eight or thirty, and was chiefly remarkable for the possession of a crop of carroty hair, an enormous moustache of the same colour, and a long, sharp nose. That he was making a holiday was evident from the fact that he wore what was obviously his best suit of blue serge, and had a silk handkerchief of at least six different colours knotted about his throat.

'I can prove it!' he shouted again. 'I can prove it!'

The chairman bent over to the clerk. 'Isn't that the man we sent to prison recently?' he said. 'Wasn't he here for assault?'

'Yes, sir, it's Dick King; Ginger King, as they call him,' replied the clerk. 'He went for a fortnight. His time was only up yesterday.'

'I say I can prove it!' vociferated Ginger King. The chairman looked across at the interrupter with some impatience. 'What is it you can prove?' he demanded.

'I can prove that what Mestur Clinton there has just telled yer's true,' replied King.

The chairman looked at Stanford. Stanford jumped to his feet.

'I do not know what this witness's evidence may be worth, your Worships,' he said, 'but I should like to hear it. Will you step down to the witness-box, my friend?'

Ginger King obeyed this summons with alacrity, and went through the process of being sworn with great solemnity.

'What is your name, my friend, and your occupation?' asked Stanford.

'Name's Richard King, only they call me Ginger in generals,' answered the witness; 'and I'm a collier.'

'Well, what do you know about this?'

'I know 'at what Mestur Clinton there's just telled yer is true.'

‘How do you know it is true?’

”Cause I can prove it’s true. Didn’t I say so?’

‘Now, then, just tell the court what you know,’ said Stanford, who saw that he had a curious customer to deal with. ‘Tell it in your own way.’

‘That’s what I were going to do at first if ye hadn’t talked so much,’ said King. ‘Ye see, it’s this here way. Two week sin’ I had a bit of a do wi’ Jack Green about yon there pup o’ mine, and I belted Jack reight, and so t’ magistrates there sent me to Stelford Gaol for a fortni’t, ’cause I wouldn’t pay t’ fine. Well, I come out yesterday, and, of course, I thowt ’at I’d tak’ a holiday for a day or so. Now, there’s a young ooman in service up at t’ Castle ’at I’m a bit sweet on, and I bethowt misen last night ’at I’d go up and see if I could see owt on her, ’cause sometimes when I’ve whistled at t’ kitchen window she’s come out into t’ garden, d’ye see? Well, I goes up, and I’d just climbed over t’ wall into t’ shrubbery, when I sees Mestur Clinton there nip across to a door. I could see him reight fair, ’cause he crossed between two lighted windows. Thinks I to myself, “Well, I didn’t know thou were out, mi lad!” and then I wonders what he were up to. So I nipped across and looked in at t’ window of t’ room that he’d entered—I could see in, ’cause t’ blind doesn’t fit close. And as sure as I’m standin’ here it all happened, as he said just now. Theer were t’ poor old gentleman lyin’ over t’ writin’-table wi’ t’ knife stickin’ out on him. Mestur Clinton touched him on t’ shoulder and looked down at his face, and then he started back like, and then t’ manager come in at a back door and collared ho’d on him. And then I made misen scarce, and so I didn’t see onny more. But that’s t’ truth ’at I’ve telled yer.’

Stanford looked at the magistrates. ‘I think your Worships will agree that this is very remarkable evidence,’ he said. ‘There are two questions I should like to put to the witness which relate to two important points. King, you say the blind of the window through which you looked did not fit closely. How much space had you through which you could look?’

‘A good couple of inches, sir,’ answered King.

‘What were you standing on when you looked through the window?’

‘A flower bed, sir, a sort o’ ornamental border.’

Stanford turned to the police officials. ‘Perhaps you will look into both these matters at once?’ he said. ‘I need not show you how important they are. Where are the boots you were wearing last night, King?’

‘I’m wearin’ ’em now, sir.’

‘Very well—the police will want to see them. That will do.’

But Rowland Parke rose—the great Mr Miller Stanford was not to have all his own way. And when Rowland Parke betrayed a tendency to sneer, those who knew that brilliant young gentleman knew that he had something up his sleeve.

‘Wait a moment, King,’ he said, as Ginger was about to leave the box. ‘I want to ask you a question or two. What time did you leave Stelford Gaol yesterday?’

‘Same time as I allus do,’ answered Ginger, amidst laughter.

‘And what time is that, pray?’

‘Eight o’clock, o’ course.’

‘What was the first thing you did?’

‘Went and had a pint, to be sure—same as you would if you’d gone without for a fortni,’ retorted Ginger.

‘And what time did you come home?’

‘Some time durin’ t’ forenoon,’ said Ginger. ‘I were none particular.’

‘You’d nothing to do and plenty of money to do it with, I suppose,’ said Parke, sarcastically. ‘Now, where did you spend the rest of the day? You may as well tell the truth, because I can easily find out.’

‘I’ve no objection to sayin’ where I spent t’ day,’ replied Ginger. ‘I were a piece at home, dressin’ misen up and havin’ a bit o’ dinner, and then I went to t’ Flyin’ Horse and stopped there all t’ afternoon.’

‘Oh, and where did you go then?’

‘Nay, I went up t’ street to t’ Blue Lion and stopped there till I bethowt misen I’d go up and see if I could get a word wi’ t’ sarvent lass.’

‘And pray how many pints of ale had you had by that time?’ asked Parke, with a glance at the bench.

‘I’m sure I never kept no count,’ answered Ginger, cheerfully.

‘A good many, I should think,’ said Parke. ‘Now, on your oath, were you sober when you went to the Castle?’

‘Aye, as sober as what you are just now!’

‘Why didn’t you go at once to tell the police what you’d seen?’

”Cause I were so upset, Mestur Parke. It made me feel reight bad. I didn’t know what to do. So I considered to sleep ower it, and to come here this mornin’ and hear what were said.’

‘Now, I don’t want to appear too inquisitive,’ said Parke, ‘but isn’t it a fact that you have been convicted several times at this court for assault, and

for fighting, and disorderly conduct?'

'Well, I know I'm handy wi' my fists,' admitted King.

'And you've also been convicted at least six times for poaching?'

'I'm fond of a bit of sport.'

Parke motioned him to leave the box and turned to the bench. 'I shall leave it to your Worships to say what amount of reliance can be placed upon the evidence of a witness of this sort,' he said, 'and I again claim that I have demonstrated to you that I am right in asking for a committal. The evidence—'

But the chairman, who had during the last few minutes been engaged in a whispered consultation with his colleagues, interrupted the young solicitor with uplifted finger.

'We have already decided upon an adjournment, Mr Parke,' he said. 'It is obvious that a more searching investigation must be made. The evidence of the last witness—and I must say that despite his career as a brawler and a poacher, I see no reason to doubt his word—will have to be thoroughly sifted and tested. The prisoner is remanded for eight days.'

It seemed to the sharp-eyed little man from Scotland Yard, who had listened in silence to all that had gone on since his arrival, that he had lighted upon as queer a lot of people as ever he had encountered in the whole of his long professional career. With the retirement of the magistrates from the bench and the disappearance of the prisoner from the dock, a regular pandemonium broke out all over those parts of the court which had been seized upon by the pitmen. Shouts and cries arose everywhere; groups began to argue; here and there discussions grew heated, and fists were raised and shaken; it took all the efforts of the local police to get the noisy mob out of doors. While the clearing-out process was going on, Inspector Cortelyou went across the rapidly-thinning space in the well of the court and approached Phillipa, who held out her hand to him.

'How do you do, Inspector Cortelyou?' she said. 'I recognised you as soon as you came in.'

'I am deeply sorry to meet you on such a sad occasion, Miss Mannersley,' said the inspector, with an old-fashioned and very polite bow. 'The only comfort I can offer you is that after what I have heard I sincerely trust I shall be able to establish your cousin's innocence.'

'Oh, how thankful, how grateful I shall be if that can be done, inspector!' exclaimed Phillipa. 'It is, of course, a monstrous thing that anyone could

suspect my unfortunate cousin of such a dreadful crime. I have just been saying to Mr Quinton that anyone who really knew Clinton would recognise that it is an impossible thing that he could have so far forgotten himself as to—to have done that. Oh, it is inconceivable—inconceivable!'

The shrewd eyes glanced at Quinton's hard, set face, and the subtle brain behind them guessed something of the manager's secret.

'Well,' he said, turning again to Phillipa, 'we must keep up heart, Miss Mannersley. I always trust a good deal to first impressions, and my own impression is that the two witnesses I have heard—your cousin Sir Clinton and the foxy-haired gentleman—were telling the absolute truth. At any rate, between ourselves—I take it that this gentleman is a friend of the family—I shall not trouble my head further about Sir Clinton in the matter, except by working in a way which will clear him.'

Phillipa's eyes filled with tears. She felt as if she could have thrown her arms round the queer little man with the wrinkled face. 'Oh, thank you, thank you a thousand times, Inspector Cortelyou!' she exclaimed. 'That gives me so much courage. And you are so clever that I feel sure you will clear things up.'

'What line do you propose to follow, inspector?' asked Quinton.

'I propose to look for the real culprit,' replied the inspector, quietly. 'Find him or her or them, or whoever it may be, and the case against Sir Clinton is at an end. After I have had an interview with the police here, Miss Mannersley,' he continued, turning to Phillipa again, 'I shall go up to the Castle to make some investigations, and perhaps I may need your help.'

Phillipa replied that she would be at his disposal at any time, and as at that moment her footman came in to say that the brougham was waiting for her, she prepared to leave the now nearly empty court, Quinton attending her. And Inspector Cortelyou, whose mind was of an extraordinary alertness, suddenly took a bold step.

'Miss Mannersley,' he said, 'you must forgive me, but all sorts of seemingly irrelevant questions are often very relevant in these affairs. I heard just now, while I was sitting at the solicitors' table there, that there has always been a strong attachment between you and your cousin. You'll pardon me if I ask you if there is any engagement between you, and when it was made?'

Phillipa answered without hesitation. 'Yes, Inspector Cortelyou,' she said, 'we became engaged the night before last.'

The inspector bowed, and Phillipa and Quinton went away. And Cortelyou knew then what he had suspected at first, that the strong-faced, resolute-looking manager was in love with the girl—and he also knew that until that moment he had not heard of her promise to her cousin. He fitted on his gloves to a nicety, set his quaint hat on his head at a jaunty angle, and went to join Illingworth, who was waiting for him.

Illingworth was in a state of nerves. He was pacing up and down his office when Inspector Cortelyou joined him, obviously at a loss as to something or other.

'You appear to be worried,' said the man from Scotland Yard.

'Worried!' exclaimed Illingworth. 'I should think so. I wonder who wouldn't be?'

'What is it that's the trouble?'

'The trouble? The colliers are the trouble,' replied Illingworth. 'Whenever anything of this sort happens they seem to go off their heads—half of 'em'll never go to work for days now! They'll talk all day and all night about this—argument's meat and drink to them. And they'll cause trouble. In fact, they've already started. Some of 'em have half killed Lione Moore, one of the witnesses, because he spied on Sir Clinton. It's because they're all so in favour of Sir Clinton that I'm afraid. I'm bound to send him to Stelford for the eight days' remand, and the men are quite capable of attempting to rescue him.'

'Nonsense!' said Inspector Cortelyou.

'I know what I'm talking about,' replied Illingworth.

'Then keep him here till night, and get him off quietly by road,' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'Well, I'm going up to the Castle. I'll see you later in the afternoon.'

# 10
## Inspector Cortelyou

The two officers whom Illingworth had despatched to the Castle immediately after hearing Ginger King's evidence were on their way back as Inspector Cortelyou made his way there, and Ginger, looking very important and triumphant, was with them, having hurried in their wake as soon as Rowland Parke had done with him. Knowing who the little gentleman in the sombre garments and the curious hat was, they stopped and saluted him.

'What this man said was quite correct, sir,' said one. 'The blind doesn't fit by two inches, and you can see all over the room from outside. And the footprints are his—we've compared them carefully.'

'Ah, just so,' said Inspector Cortelyou. He regarded Ginger King with a grave interest. 'I suppose you'd like Sir Clinton to be cleared, my man, wouldn't you?' he asked.

'Why, of course, guv'nor,' replied Ginger. 'Knowin' as how he's innocent, I naturally should.'

'Well, then, don't go having too many pints, and don't get into any rows,' said the inspector. 'The quieter you keep the better witness you'll be. And it largely depends on you, my friend.'

'All right, guv'nor,' said Ginger. 'I'll keep straight—I'll go right away to work wi' the next shift and keep out o' mischief.'

Inspector Cortelyou nodded and went on his way, and presently came to the Castle, whose master lay dead within its darkened rooms. He stood in the grounds for a moment looking about him. Although almost the whole of his working life had been spent in dealing with crime and criminals, Inspector John Cortelyou had a great eye for beauty, and he loved the romantic and picturesque. He accordingly gazed with great appreciation at the scene before him—at the fine old Norman keep which was still grand and impressive in its slow yielding to decay, at the elms which shut in the garden with its neat beds and smooth lawn, and at the picturesque old house which had been built out of the ruins of the Castle. And it struck him with a

sad sense of irony and of the mutability of things that the owner of this fine old place should have been struck down so suddenly and have had to leave everything without so much as time to take a last look round in farewell.

'However, that's not attending to business,' mused the inspector. 'Let's get on to that.'

He went up to the front door and rang the bell, and was instantly admitted by Dauncey, who had caught sight of him from an upper window and had hastened down to meet him. The old butler bowed him into the hall.

'I dare say you know who I am, Mr Dauncey,' said the inspector. 'I saw you in court, you know.'

'Yes, sir—yes, sir,' said the old man. 'My mistress told me you were coming up, sir. She is very much worn out, inspector, and she has had to go and rest.'

'Ah, poor thing, I don't wonder,' said the inspector. 'I hope she'll sleep—best thing for her just now.'

'I was to ask you, inspector, if you would take any refreshment—some lunch, now, or a glass of wine?' said Dauncey. 'You have had a long journey, sir.'

'Aye, but I lunched on the train, coming down from St Pancras,' replied Inspector Cortelyou. 'No, nothing just now, thank 'ee. I might be inclined to join you in a glass in your own room later on, eh?—I may have a question or two to ask, d'ye see.'

'With pleasure, sir,' replied the butler. 'Anything that I can do I shall be glad to do. Then you'd like to see the study at once, sir?' he continued, in a hushed voice. 'It's just as it was when the body was removed—nothing's been touched, sir. That was Mr Illingworth's order, sir—in fact, nobody's been in since last night.'

'That's right,' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'Yes, I'll go there at once, Mr Dauncey. And don't let me be disturbed by anyone, unless it's Mr Mingworth, while I'm there.'

'I'll see to that, sir,' said the old man. He led the way through the inner hall and along the wide corridor, which extended the length of the house. 'That's the library door, sir,' he said, in passing.

'Ah, that's where Mr Stead was supposed to be at the time the crime was committed, isn't it?' said the inspector. 'H'm—I'll have a look at it from the study.'

The old butler led him into the study from the corridor, unlocking the door with a key which he took from his pocket and then handed over to the detective.

'Everything's as it was, sir,' he whispered. 'I'll go now—you can lock yourself in if you like.'

'Where shall I find you if I want you?' asked Inspector Cortelyou.

'If I am not down the hall, sir, one of the footmen will fetch me,' answered Dauncey.

Left to himself, and having locked the door, the detective's first proceeding was to draw up all the blinds and flood the room with the afternoon sunlight. He turned from the big bow window and looked around him. There was nothing disorderly in the appearance of the room; every article of furniture seemed to be in its proper place; there were no signs of any fierce struggle; nothing to show at first sight that a particularly foul and cowardly murder had taken place there not twenty hours before. But on the loose papers on the desk were certain dark stains which Inspector Cortelyou knew to be the victim's blood; there were more stains on the desk itself, and one on the carpet beneath.

He approached the desk, and, bending over it, looked at the papers thus stained, which he supposed to be the last things that had engaged the dead man's attention. They seemed to be documents relating to the colliery—abstracts, reports, balance sheets, letters, and, so far as the detective could see without touching them, they were all of an ordinary business character. Across the blotting pad in the centre of the desk lay a pen—he supposed it to have fallen from the dead man's hand as the fatal blow was struck. However, he saw no sign to show that Sir Robert had been writing at the moment.

Turning away from the desk, Inspector Cortelyou began to examine the room, not in any exhaustive fashion, but by strolling here and there about it. It was a large apartment, entirely panelled in black oak, and contained so many articles of furniture in the way of writing and reading-tables, stands, chests, and other impedimenta of like nature, that there was not much room to move about in it. Low bookcases of black oak were arranged against the panelling; here and there in the panels hung etchings and old steel plates. And, with his hands in his pockets and apparently doing nothing more than examining these pictures, Inspector Cortelyou began to walk round the room, in reality keeping a sharp eye on the walls. And in one corner he sud-

denly paused, seeing that at some time or other a door, low and narrow, had been cut through the panelling.

This was on one of the two outer walls of the room—the same wall in which stood the door that opened on the garden.

'This,' said Inspector Cortelyou to himself, 'this must be a cupboard'; and he tried to open the door by pulling at the beading of the panels. The door, however, remained fixed. He beat upon it with his hand; it sounded very hollow within—much more hollow than a cupboard would have done. And a sudden idea occurring to him, he unlocked the garden door, and, stepping on to the path, glanced along the side of the house.

'Just what I thought!' he exclaimed. 'I was sure of it.'

Built out from the line of the study wall, and projecting in a semicircle until it terminated at the wall of another wing of the house, was a building of two storeys in height, which doubtless added to the architectural effect, but did not, so far as Inspector Cortelyou could see, possess any utilitarian feature. He made a rough calculation, by pacing, of how far it was from the from the garden door to the angle of the building; returning to the study, he paced the distance to the door in the panelling.

'Also just as I thought,' he said. 'That door leads into the building at the angle. I'll lay a pound to a penny it's a stairway.'

Letting himself out into the corridor, he went in search of Dauncey, and, finding him, at once led him back to the study. He pointed out the door in the panelling.

'Look here, Mr Dauncey,' he said. 'What's that? A cupboard?'

The old man shook his head. 'No, sir, no!' he said. 'Dear me, now, to think of you seeing that, inspector! You must have sharp eyes. No, sir—it was a fad of my poor dear master's, was that, and one of which he soon tired.'

'Aye; but what is it?' asked the inspector.

'It's a stairway, sir, to the great gallery above,' replied Dauncey. 'He was a very romantic man, sir, was the late Sir Robert, and a good many years ago he made some alterations in the house, and this was one of them. You'll have noticed, inspector, that in this house there's a hall which runs right through from one end to the other. Well, sir, it's the same upstairs—there's a gallery which does the same thing. That's where all the best and finest pictures are kept. Now, Sir Robert's bedroom opens off that gallery, and when he was making the alterations I spoke of he had two stairways made in the

walls—these walls are six feet thick, inspector—one to the study and one to the library so that if he wanted books or paper in the night he could come straight down for them from his room without the trouble of having to go all round by the great staircase. But, as a matter of fact, he scarcely ever used them, for they hadn't been made very long when he fell down one and put his ankle out, and he bumped his forehead very badly in coming down the other, and after that he said they were too steep and too narrow, and that he'd been an old ass for having them made, and, to tell you the truth, sir, I don't think he ever used them again.'

'All the same, they're both there,' said Inspector Cortelyou.

'Oh, they're both there, inspector,' answered the butler. 'Would you like to look into this one, sir?'

'It's locked,' said the detective. 'I've tried it.'

'No, it's not locked, sir,' said Dauncey. 'There isn't a lock; it's a spring. See—this is it. You press your finger there.'

He pressed a projecting portion of the panelling, and the door flew open.

Inspector Cortelyou saw a very narrow stairway of dark wood, going steeply up in the wall.

'Like to go up it, sir?' asked Dauncey. 'If so, I'll go up first and open the top door. There's plenty of light from the gallery.'

'Not just now, thank'ee,' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'Show me the similar stair in the library, will you?'

'With pleasure, inspector,' replied the butler. 'But if you don't mind, sir, we'll go round by the corridor. I—-the fact is, I can't a-bear to pass my poor master's desk, sir. It gives me the creeps.'

'Ah, I don't wonder,' said the detective. 'It's very natural.'

Dauncey led the way round to the library, and pointed out the companion stairway. Then, at Inspector Cortelyou's request, he took him up the great staircase in the inner hall and showed him the stairway doors in the gallery.

'They all open in the same way,' remarked the butler, demonstrating the secret of the panel in each case. 'Like to go down now that you can see?'

'No,' answered the inspector. 'Shut them up again. Now, look here, have you got such a thing as a particularly strong lamp in the house—a very strong one?'

Dauncey could not think of anything at first, but suddenly remembered having heard Fisher, the footman, talking in the servants' hall recently of a very powerful bicycle lamp which he had just bought. And he took

Inspector Cortelyou down again, and sent for Fisher and the lamp, and had its capabilities demonstrated.

'And now don't let anybody disturb me on any account,' said the detective, possessing himself of the lamp, 'and don't allow those stairway doors to be opened, Mr Dauncey. I want to examine those two places carefully.'

Then he went back to the study and locked himself in again, and, coming through to the library, he also locked the door of that apartment. And then, with the aid of the acetylene lamp, he began an examination of the staircases set in the walls—-and he began with that in the library first.

If anyone had been there to watch him, Inspector Cortelyou's thoroughness and patience would have seemed as wearisome as it was amazing. Hour after hour went by, and found him going over every inch of the doors and the walls of the staircases. The walls were of smooth, highly-polished wood; the doors were panelled. He paid the most scrupulous attention to the projections in the panelling which contained the secret springs by which the doors opened, peering at them and about them through a pair of special glasses which he had produced from his pocket with as much anxiety as if he expected them to speak. And it was already growing towards dusk when he at last shut off the lamp in the quiet study, put his glasses in their case with a decisive snap, and knew that his labour had been successful.

'I've got him! I've got him!' he said, triumphantly. 'And I'll hang him, as sure as my name's John Cortelyou!'

# 11
## The Secret Stair

Inspector Cortelyou had just unlocked the door of the study and let himself out into the corridor when he saw Dauncey advancing from the inner hall. Behind the old butler the detective saw two shapes which, in the dim light, he did not recognise.

'I beg your pardon, inspector,' said Dauncey. 'I didn't mean to disturb you, but there's the chief constable and Mr Illingworth here, sir, and they're wanting to see you particularly, so I was coming to let you know.'

'All right,' replied Inspector Cortelyou. 'I've finished—for the present. I'll come and speak to them.'

He followed the butler down to the hall, and found Illingworth to be accompanied by a tall, handsome man, whom Inspector Cortelyou immediately set down as an ex-cavalry officer, and who gave the little man from Scotland Yard a keen and searching look of interest.

'Good evening, inspector,' said Illingworth. 'This gentleman is Major Bryson, our chief constable. He has come specially over to see how things are going on, and would like to hear if you have anything to tell him.'

'We will go back to the study,' said the detective. He led the way back to the scene of his operations, and turned up the electric light in both study and library. Major Bryson looked about him with swift glances. He turned to Inspector Cortelyou as the detective came back from switching on the lights in the farther apartment.

'I understand you have been here some hours, inspector?' he said.

'I have been here five hours, sir,' replied the detective.

'I have heard a great deal of your powers,' said Major Bryson. 'Have you come to any conclusion about the matter?'

Inspector Cortelyou sat down near the desk at which Sir Robert Mannersley had been murdered.

'I have been on my feet ever since I got here,' he said. 'I must sit down. You were not at the hearing before the magistrates, sir?'

‘No,’ answered Major Bryson. ‘I was in another part of the country. But I have read the evidence over since arriving this evening.’

‘And what is your opinion, sir?’ asked the detective.

The chief constable bit one end of his fine moustache-a trick which those who were best acquainted with him knew to denote considerable perplexity.

‘Well,’ he said, after a moment’s hesitation, ‘on the first view of the case I should have considered Sir Clinton guilty. I should have looked at it in this way—that, being of a hottish temper, as was shown, he lost control over himself, snatched up the knife, and struck blindly at his uncle.’

‘From behind, sir?’ observed Inspector Cortelyou, quietly.

‘It scarcely seems likely,’ answered Major Bryson. ‘And I confess that the evidence of the collier, King, is startling, for I understand that the foot-prints outside correspond with the nailed boots he was wearing, and that the blind—that blind, I suppose—is as he said. Isn’t that so, Illingworth?’

‘That’s quite so, sir,’ answered Illingworth.

Major Bryson bit his moustache and looked at Inspector Cortelyou. ‘But I want to know what you think,’ he said, suddenly. ‘You’ve a reputation for these affairs, you know. What’s your opinion?’

‘My opinion, sir,’ answered the detective, slowly—‘my opinion is that Sir Clinton Mannersley did not murder his uncle. He had no motive—’

‘He felt resentment,’ interrupted Illingworth.

‘Whatever resentment or anger he felt,’ answered Inspector Cortelyou, ‘had been swept away the night before by the fact that his cousin, Miss Phillipa, had promised to marry him. She is not the sort of young woman to break her word, and it is not within the bounds of probability that a man should murder the father of the girl he is going to marry. I believe that Sir Clinton’s account of his visit to this room was the truth. I also believe that the collier King spoke the truth. Sir Clinton did not do this thing.’

The chief constable and Illingworth stared at each other and then at the little man from Scotland Yard.

‘Then, in heaven’s name, who did?’ exclaimed Major Bryson.

Inspector Cortelyou produced his snuffbox and took a pinch. He pointed with the closed snuffbox to the library door. ‘Somebody who entered this room from that, sir,’ he said.

Illingworth uttered a sharp exclamation. ‘But Mr Stead was in that room all the time!’ he said.

The detective put his snuffbox deliberately in his pocket. ‘Just so,’ he said dryly.

Illingworth stared at him. ‘You don’t mean to say that you suggest—’ he began.

Inspector Cortelyou got up from his chair. ‘I suggest nothing—at present,’ he said. ‘And I don’t care very much for suggestions at any time. I prefer certainties. But come this way, gentlemen.’

He led them into the library and to the door of the secret staircase, which he opened carefully. Major Bryson and Illingworth gazed with surprise at the cavity within.

‘Now, gentlemen,’ said the detective, ‘this is a staircase which communicates with the big gallery above. There are sixteen steps, each a foot high, in it. Come back with me to the study. Now here,’ he continued, leading them to the corresponding stair in the adjoining room, ‘is a companion staircase also leading to the gallery in exactly forty-five feet; therefore, from this door in the study, round by the gallery, to the door in the library, it is, roughly speaking, well within eighty feet. It could be traversed by anyone who knows the secrets of these staircases and doors within one minute.’

Major Bryson and Illingworth, not yet comprehending anything of what Inspector Cortelyou was after, stared at him in wonder. He went on, after another consultation with his snuffbox:

‘I say, by anyone who knows the secret of these staircases, gentlemen,’ he continued. ‘Now, observe that those doors in the panelling do not open by locks or handles, but by springs, and, therefore, whoever it was who used them on the night of the murder, was some person conversant with their peculiarities.’

‘Yes, but what is there to show that they were used on the night of the murder?’ asked Illingworth, half incredulous of all that the detective had said.

‘I will come to that,’ answered Inspector Cortelyou. ‘Now I have ascertained from the butler, Dauncey, that these staircases were specially designed by the late Sir Robert for his own use, and that for a long time he had never made use of them. No other person in the house would be likely to use them. It is only a few days since that they, in conjunction with this study, were thoroughly cleaned. Yet they have been used, and within the past forty-eight hours, and, in my opinion, by the murderer.’

The other two looked at him expectantly, wondering what they were going to hear.

'Then you think—' began Major Bryson.

'I believe,' said the detective, with emphasis, 'I believe that whoever killed Sir Robert Mannersley used those stairs. Observe that the dead man's desk in this study faces the door of the library. Impossible to enter that way in the brief time available. But quite possible, easy—knowing the secret stairways and the springs—to enter the study from behind, to commit the crime, and to retreat by the same way. And, gentlemen, I will stake my professional reputation that that was how the deed was done!'

Major Bryson began to bite his moustache again; Illingworth, who had listened to Inspector Cortelyou with evident impatience, smiled somewhat superciliously.

'You forget,' he said, 'that Mr Stead was in the library there all the time, all the ten minutes, during which, according to Dr Childe's emphatic testimony, the murder must have been committed.'

'I forget nothing,' said Inspector Cortelyou.

'But whoever was in the library at that time must surely have seen the murderer enter or leave the staircase!' said Illingworth. 'It's inconceivable that he or they shouldn't.'

'I quite agree with you,' replied the detective.

'Well, Stead was there—he said so,' continued Illingworth.

Inspector Cortelyou made a slight bow and took another pinch of snuff. Major Bryson, who had been watching him keenly, spoke again.

'It strikes me you have found something,' he said.

'Yes,' answered Inspector Cortelyou. 'I have fingerprints.'

Both men looked further inquiries.

'Come this way, gentlemen,' said the detective. He led them into the library again, on his way picking up the acetylene lamp, which he carefully relighted. 'Now, if you will kindly turn that electric light off, Mr Illingworth, I will show you something.'

Advancing to the door in the panelling, he handed Major Bryson a peculiar looking-glass set in a metal holder, and, directing his attention to a certain part of the outer frame, turned the powerful rays of the lamp full on it.

'Now, sir,' he said, 'what do you see there?'

‘Oh, that’s quite plain,’ answered Major Bryson. ‘I see the marks of fingers—of three fingers.’

‘Do you see any peculiarity about them?’ asked the detective.

‘No,’ answered Major Bryson. ‘No—I can’t say that I do. I see the prints plainly enough on the light wood.’

‘Allow Mr Illingworth to look, if you please, sir.’

Illingworth looked with undisguised curiosity at the marks, which showed clearly through the powerful magnifying glass. But he, too, failed to point out any peculiarity.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I see nothing out of the common.’

Inspector Cortelyou smiled. ‘Perhaps you gentlemen are not so used as I am to observing these things,’ he said. ‘Allow me to instruct you. These are the fingers of a left hand. The hand was turned upside down—that is, with the thumb downwards—as it grasped the edge of the door. It grasped the door very tightly—convulsively. One reason why the marks are as plain as they are is that the owner of the hand smokes a great many cigarettes, that his fingers are much stained at the tips, and that when he grasped this door he was perspiring—very likely with fear or apprehension. But the peculiarity is that these fingers, following them upwards, are the first, the third and the fourth. The second finger is missing.’

The detective walked across the room, switched on the electric light, and put out his lamp.

‘I could show you more than that, gentlemen,’ he said, returning to his companions, ‘but that is sufficient. Now, Mr Illingworth, you, I believe, have been acquainted with this place some time?’

‘Ever since I was a boy,’ answered Illingworth, in a tone which showed that he was wondering what the detective was trying to get at.

‘Then you doubtless know the people well—the prominent people, at any rate?’ said Inspector Cortelyou. ‘Now, do you know any well-known man hereabouts who has lost the second finger of his left hand?’

Illingworth considered this question for some time. He was trying to recollect the facts of various shooting accidents of which he had heard from time to time. But he could remember nothing.

‘No,’ he answered. ‘I don’t.’

‘Well,’ said the detective, ‘I do, then. And that’s the man who was in this room while the murder was being committed in the next—if the doctor is right.’

Both men started with astonishment.

'What—Stead!' exclaimed Illingworth.

'Just so—Stead,' replied the inspector. 'In my line of life I have to observe everything, and as he sat near me at the solicitors' table this morning I noticed that the second finger of his left hand was missing. I also noticed that his fingers were much stained.'

'But you don't mean to tell me that you suspect him because of that, and of that!' exclaimed Illingworth, pointing to the door in the panelling. 'Why, Mr Stead's one of the most respected gentlemen in the district. He's a churchwarden!'

'Is he really?' said the detective. 'Ah! I should have thought so from his general appearance. All the same, I haven't a doubt that those are his fingerprints, and that they were made on the night of the murder.'

Major Bryson pulled on his gloves.

'What are you going to do, Cortelyou?' he asked.

'I am going to wire to headquarters for one of our most expert photographers and for additional help, sir,' answered the inspector. 'In the meantime, and before we leave here, I want all this place—library, study, staircases, windows—sealed up. That must be done.'

'See to that, Illingworth,' said Major Bryson. 'And, of course, all this is to be kept absolutely quiet—not a word, Illingworth, to a soul. And your special line, Cortelyou?'

The detective consulted his snuffbox again.

'Ah!' he said. 'You can leave that to me, sir. I sometimes work in what others might call a curious fashion. What's concerning me now is—the motive. You understand? The motive!'

# 12
## The Cheque

A good many hard-working people would have considered that after a journey from London, an attendance at a sitting of magistrates, and a painstaking investigation of certain facts of a murder, a man might be fully justified in knocking off work for that day; but when he had finally got rid of the chief constable and Illingworth, Inspector Cortelyou prepared to do some more, being a firm believer in the doctrine that one should always work when one has the chance. There was just one little matter that he wanted to attend to that night, and it was one which could be attended to in a pleasant fashion.

'Now that I've finished,' he said to Dauncey, to whom he had explained the arrangements about the rooms, 'I can spare a few minutes to have that little drop of something that you were so kind as to offer me. Just between ourselves, eh?'

'Miss Mannersley said I was to be sure to see that you took some supper here, sir,' said the old butler. 'Do now, inspector.'

'Thank'ee,' replied the detective, 'but I've ordered my supper for a certain hour at the inn—give my respects to your mistress all the same. No, I've just got a bit of time to spare for a glass with you—I'm a bit tired now.'

'Then come this way, sir,' said Dauncey, and led him off to the butler's pantry, and installed him in an easy chair while he produced decanters and glasses. 'Aye, I dare say you are tired, inspector,' he continued, as he himself sat down and they clinked glasses, 'and I wish your work had been of a less sorrowful nature, sir.'

Inspector Cortelyou made a suitable reply, and for a few minutes devoted his attention to the cigar which Dauncey had given him. Then, with the practised skill of an old hand, he led the conversation in the way he wished it to go, and by devious and gentle paths brought the old butler, who was by no means disinclined to talk, being naturally garrulous, to the subject of Marshall Stead.

‘A talented young man, that, I should say, Mr Dauncey,’ he remarked. ‘Much trusted by the late Sir Robert, I should think, to have attained such a position.’

Dauncey wagged his head. ‘Ah, indeed, sir!’ he said. ‘Yes, it’s seldom that a young man gets on so fast. Dear me! I’ve thought many a time when I’ve seen him dining here (for my poor master came to treating him quite as a gentleman, and asked him here often), that no one ever would have thought such a thing could be. For you know, sir, his mother was at one time housekeeper here at the Castle.’

The detective pricked up his ears. ‘Bless me!’ he exclaimed. ‘You don’t say so!’

‘Yes, sir, and not so many years ago,’ replied Dauncey. ‘Ah, I remember Mrs Stead coming and going very well, because, of course, I’ve been here a long, long time. I always understood that she was the widow of some poor clergyman in whom Sir Robert was interested—at any rate, she had very superior manners. And it was Sir Robert who sent this boy to school at Stelford and got him a place when he left school.’

‘Ah, in the colliery countinghouse, I suppose?’ said Inspector Cortelyou.

‘No, sir, that was before the colliery was in full go. No, he got him on the railway as a clerk,’ replied Dauncey. ‘But, of course, as soon as the colliery started he put him in there, and he rose from one step to another until he’s now head of the countinghouse.’

‘Aye, to be sure,’ said the inspector. ‘Mother still living?’

‘No, sir, Mrs Stead’s dead—died a year ago,’ replied Dauncey.

‘Young man married?’ asked the inspector.

‘No, sir, he’s a single man; not but what there’s young women in the place would be glad to have him,’ said the butler. ‘Steady young man, sir—a churchwarden.’

‘Ah, that’s your sort to save and get on,’ remarked the detective. He drank off the contents of his glass, refused more refreshment, and said he must be going. And within another hour Inspector Cortelyou was in his bed and fast asleep, oblivious of everything.

But he was wide enough awake next morning when he plunged into his day’s work. His assistants and the expert photographer came down by the first train from London, and he was busy with them for nearly all the time up to noon. And if Mr Marshall Stead had but known it, there was not a moment from that time forward that Inspector Cortelyou was not aware of his

doings, through the assistant, who was a past master in the art of disguise, and contrived to mingle in the industrial life of Mannersley without attracting attention.

For the inspector, being one of those men who take a strong line from the first, had at an early stage of his own appearance on the scene formed the conclusion that the cashier at the colliery had either committed the murder or was implicated in it. Beyond the question of the fingerprints he would have been at a loss to explain his reasons for his belief, yet it was there. And often in the course of a long career an impression had been formed, an instinct had arisen in his mind, which had set him on the track, and he had seldom been deceived by it; and the instinct which was part of his nature told him that in this case, if he followed the scent, he would run his quarry down.

He was not the sort of man to follow conventional methods of procedure, nor to stick at anything in gaining his ends, and on the second day after his examination of the room at the Castle he went to Mark Quinton's rooms and asked to see him. They had met only an hour before at the inquest then being held on Sir Robert's body, but the detective had at that time said nothing of the call, and Quinton was obviously surprised to see him. But he made him welcome all the same.

'You are just in time to take a cup of tea with me, inspector,' he said, ringing the bell of his sitting room. 'Or perhaps you would like something a little stronger—a drop of whisky, now?'

'Thank you, sir; a cup of tea is exactly what I have been longing for as I came up the hill,' answered the detective. He took the chair which the manager pointed out, and looked round him at the room in which Quinton had arranged his own books and pictures. 'Nice quarters you have here, sir—an old farmhouse, if I mistake not?'

'Yes,' answered Quinton. 'I was fortunate in finding such comfortable rooms so close to a colliery village. Here, you see, one might fancy oneself quite in the country. Now, here's the tea, and I can promise you real farmhouse cream and butter.'

Inspector Cortelyou made no mention of business until they had drunk their tea; instead, he talked of books and pictures, of which he soon made it evident that he had a good knowledge. But when Quinton had given him a cigar and a light for it, and he had taken the first few whiffs at it, he looked his host fairly and squarely in the face.

‘Mr Quinton,’ he said. ‘I’m a man of plain words—that is, when I like to be. I’ve come here for a straight talk with you.’

Quinton, who had lighted a big briar pipe, bowed his head.

‘And I’ll tell you why,’ continued the detective. ‘I’ve come to you because, from what I’ve seen of you and the people here, you’re the only man that’s likely to be of use to me. I’ve watched you. You’re a straight man and a resolute man, and a man with brains—and you can keep confidence.’

Quinton nodded without speaking.

‘I want somebody to talk to,’ said the inspector, ‘and I’ll talk to you. Also, I want some help which only you can give.’

‘You mean in this case?’ said Quinton.

‘Certainly in this case,’ answered the inspector. ‘And to waste no more words, I’ll tell you straight out that I believe Sir Clinton innocent, and Marshall Stead implicated, if not actually guilty.’

‘Great heavens!’ exclaimed Quinton. ‘Stead! But why?’

‘Listen carefully and I’ll tell you,’ answered the detective, and told him of all he had discovered, and of the theory he had built and was building in his own mind. And Quinton listened without saying a word, and in some way or other was fascinated.

‘Well, that’s extraordinarily strange about the fingerprints,’ he said, when Inspector Cortelyou had finished. ‘Of course, I can’t follow you in everything, but I see the reason of most of what you say. But—the motive?’

‘Ah, that’s where you can be of use!’ exclaimed the detective. ‘Now, Mr Quinton, are you absolute boss of affairs at this place—the colliery, I mean?’

‘I am, now,’ answered Quinton. ‘I received a formal notification from Sir Robert’s solicitors, acting on behalf of the executors and of Miss Mannersley, only this morning, of my appointment as absolute manager until further notice. Of course, Sir Robert was his own manager-in-chief until his death.’

‘Then you are in control of everything. Does that include the counting-house?’ asked the inspector. ‘It does?—good! Now, I suppose Stead has full control of the books, and that they are periodically audited?’

‘They are audited twice a year,’ answered Quinton. ‘In March and September.’

‘Could you arrange a surprise audit?’ asked Inspector Cortelyou.

Quinton considered matters. ‘Absolutely a surprise one?’ he asked.

‘Yes. One of which nobody but you and the auditors would know anything whatever,’ replied the inspector.

Quinton considered matters a little more. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it can be done.’

‘Then, if you want to help me, do it,’ said Inspector Cortelyou.

‘You suspect something?’ said the manager. ‘I can assure you that Stead has the reputation of being a thoroughly straight man.’

‘I want to know all I can,’ answered the detective. ‘You have a good excuse for auditing the books.’

‘Well, it shall be done as soon as possible after the funeral is over,’ said Quinton.

Inspector Cortelyou rose to go. But instead of going directly he remained gazing thoughtfully at a picture.

‘By the by,’ he said, suddenly turning on Quinton, ‘what were the exact circumstances of that case of forgery against Sir Clinton Mannersley?’

Quinton knocked the ashes out of his pipe before slowly refilling it. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I know the circumstances. They have been told to me. I was not here at the time. But—they’ve nothing to do with this case, have they?’

Inspector Cortelyou smiled—one of the smiles which brought out all the many wrinkles in his face.

‘How can I answer that question, sir, unless I know what they were?’ he said.

‘Ah, just so,’ said Quinton. ‘Well, briefly—for it’s an affair I don’t care to talk about—the facts were these. A cheque for two thousand pounds drawn by Sir Robert Mannersley in favour of Mr Clinton Mannersley was presented at the bank in Stelford through a bank in London, and after expert examination was refused payment, and was submitted to Sir Robert, who unhesitatingly repudiated it. Mr Clinton Mannersley, questioned, stated that he received the cheque enclosed in a letter from his uncle, which he produced. That letter Sir Robert also repudiated, though it was written on his own notepaper, and had, without doubt, been posted here. Mr Clinton Mannersley had, unfortunately, cashed this cheque with a moneylender of his acquaintance, and as the man could not get his money he accused Clinton of forgery, and informed the police. When the case came on Sir Robert was most emphatic in his denial of cheque and letter, and an expert showed that Sir Robert and Mr Clinton’s handwriting was much alike, but

that in the nephew's there were certain oddities which were in both letter and cheque. And the result was—what you know.'

'Ah!' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'A pretty case! Did Sir Robert always stand to his opinion?'

'Sir Robert Mannersley,' answered Quinton, rising and putting on his hat, 'was not the sort of man to change an opinion. Besides, he knew his own signature.'

'Aye, of course he would,' said the detective. 'But, I suppose it never occurred to him that someone might have forged letter and signature—someone who wasn't his nephew, eh?'

'Good heavens! but why?' exclaimed Quinton.

'Why, to get his nephew into his bad books, and out of the way, and all sorts of things,' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'There, that's something to think of, sir. Ah, we shall see daylight yet!'

He went away smiling, leaving Quinton mystified. And for the next few days nothing seemed to happen. Sir Robert Mannersley was laid to rest in the old churchyard; Sir Clinton waited in Stelford Gaol; Inspector Cortelyou appeared to be doing nothing in particular beyond paying occasional visits to the scene of the murder; everybody else was looking forward to the day of the adjourned hearing.

But before that day something happened. One evening, as Phillipa sat with a relative who had come to stay with her, Dauncey announced that Mr Stead was in the morning-room, and begged to see her. Phillipa immediately went to interview the man in whom she believed her father to have had a faithful servant. To her he seemed the same Marshall Stead she had always known, and she sat down to talk to him. And, without wasting words, the cashier, making sure they were alone, said, in a low voice:

'Miss Phillipa, it is in my power to clear Sir Clinton Mannersley of the charge of your father's murder!'

# 13
## I KNOW!

If someone had suddenly told Phillipa Mannersley that her father had come to life again, she could scarcely have been more surprised than she was by the cashier's announcement. She stared at him with dilating eyes, wondering if he had taken leave of his senses—if some strange event, some sudden illness, had upset his mental balance. But the Stead she saw sitting before her was the Stead she had always known—the cool, calm, imperturbable young man, scrupulously dressed after his quiet and almost sombre fashion, and evidently quite master of himself. And she turned white and then red and then white again, as she realised the significance of the announcement which he had made to her almost as unconcernedly as he might have announced any trivial event connected with the colliery.

'I—I do not understand,' she faltered.

The cashier drew his chair a little nearer to hers, and spoke again in his usual even tones and in a guardedly low voice. 'I will repeat what I said,' he almost whispered. 'It is in my power to clear your cousin Sir Clinton on the charge of—'

Phillipa raised a hand. 'Don't, please!' she said. 'I can't bear to hear that mentioned. But'—she paused and continued to gaze at him in astonishment—'but if that is so,' she continued at last, 'why did you not do so at the hearing before the magistrates?'

Stead, who never ceased to watch her, smiled faintly. It was rarely, as all who knew him were aware, that he ever did smile, and when he did the smile was inscrutable. It seemed to Phillipa that it was more inscrutable than ever on this occasion.

'It was perhaps not in my power to do so then,' he said.

'Ah, I see,' said Phillipa; 'you have heard of new evidence—perhaps you have discovered some? Of course, you will see the solicitor and the police at once, Mr Stead?'

She was wondering why he had not gone to police and solicitor before, instead of coming to her. And, as if his deep-set eyes were able to read her very thoughts, he immediately referred to what was in her mind.

'I came to you in the first instance,' he said.

'Yes—why particularly to me?' she asked.

'Because you are the first person concerned,' he answered.

Again Phillipa gazed at him in blank wonder. It was a full minute before she could find words.

'I?' she exclaimed. 'I think my cousin Sir Clinton is the first person concerned, Mr Stead.'

The cashier again smiled his faint, inscrutable smile. 'In a certain sense, yes,' he said; 'in another sense, no.'

'I still fail to comprehend your meaning,' she said.

Stead, who had been smoothing the hat which lay on his knee, and regarding it as he might have regarded a cat or a pet dog, suddenly looked at her with a penetrating gaze.

'On the evidence that was put before the magistrates do you think your cousin will be acquitted?' he asked her.

Phillipa felt herself beginning to be annoyed. She knew that her father had trusted Marshall Stead, that he had encouraged and helped him, and had invited him to the house, but she herself had always felt a curious dislike of him, amounting almost to repulsion, and she had no desire to enter into any personal arguments with him. And her tone unconsciously assumed something of coldness and hauteur.

'I do not see any necessity for discussing that,' she replied.

'Pardon me,' said Stead, 'but I do. It is relative to what I have to say, Miss Mannersley. Otherwise I should not have asked you the question—naturally.'

Phillipa felt that he had got the best of her there, and was none the better pleased with herself.

'In that case,' she said, 'yes, I do think Sir Clinton will be acquitted.'

Stead inclined his head as if he had quite expected her answer. 'So a great many people think and say,' he observed. 'They rely on the evidence of the man King—Ginger King.'

'I believe,' said Phillipa, who was becoming more and more displeased, 'I believe that King's evidence has been proved to be true.'

'By whom?' asked Stead.

‘By the police,’ answered Phillipa.

Stead smiled. He looked round the room, not as if searching for possible eavesdroppers, but as though considering something. After a moment’s silence he faced Phillipa again.

‘Miss Mannersley,’ he said, ‘King’s evidence was false. King was not outside the Castle that night. As a matter of fact—of truth—King, at the time he said he was at the Castle, outside that particular window, was poaching. And at the next hearing King’s evidence will be rebutted—by the two men who were with him in Littlecote Spinney.’

Phillipa stared at him with eyes in which incredulity struggled with fear. ‘But the bootprints!’ she exclaimed.

‘These men will prove that King, seeing a light in the study window as they passed, all three, down the lane at the side of your grounds, climbed over the wall to look through the window,’ replied Stead. ‘It is quite true that he did that, and that the bootprints were undoubtedly his. But it was after eleven o’clock when he was there—a long time after the—’

‘Yes, yes!’ said Phillipa, hurriedly. ‘But why did not these men speak before? I suppose they were in court?’

‘I don’t think they were in court,’ said Stead. ‘Their appearances in court, like King’s, are usually in the dock. They are notorious poachers, and they naturally did not want their whereabouts that night known.’

‘But why did King say what he did?’ asked Phillipa. ‘What was his object?’

‘Ginger King, Miss Mannersley,’ answered Stead, ‘is a notorious liar and bragger, as his associates at the pot-houses can prove. Moreover, King that morning was, as anybody might have seen, somewhat the worse for liquor. Further, your cousin has always been popular with the miners because he used to give them racing tips, and King no doubt thought he was doing a fine thing in making some return. Lastly, you must remember that King gave his evidence after hearing your cousin’s statement. If he had offered it before, there might have been something in it. As it is there is nothing. It will not avail Sir Clinton anything.’

Phillipa felt as if a heavy blow had been dealt her. Both Miller Stanford and Inspector Cortelyou had laid great stress upon the high importance of King’s evidence, and during the last dark days of sorrow she had comforted herself greatly with the hope that Clinton would soon be released. She was quick-witted enough to grasp the fact that if what Stead had told her

about the two poachers was true, King's testimony would be worse than worthless, and the strongest point of the defence would be gone. She sat, miserable and uncertain, in silence for a moment or two, and Stead watched her.

'I suppose these men came to you?' she said at last.

'They did,' he answered. 'As a great many of our men do—when they are in trouble.'

'Then are you the only person who knows about this?' she asked.

'I am,' he answered.

Phillipa rose and walked restlessly across the room; she scarcely knew why. On the other side of the table, which stood in the centre, she suddenly turned and faced the cashier.

'Would it not be possible to—to get these men out of the way?' she asked. 'To—to give them so much money to go away to America, or Canada, or—somewhere? Surely they could be—'

'Could be bought off?' he interrupted, with one of the smiles which Phillipa so much disliked. 'I dare say, Miss Mannersley, I dare say they could. Men of that sort always can be bought off. Oh, yes, we could furnish them with money and send them to Timbuktu or the Fiji Islands, and set them up, and in a year's time they would write for more, and they would probably come home and try blackmail. And, in addition to that, Miss Mannersley, tampering with the law is a very serious offence, and, in this case, to remove highly important witnesses would be regarded as a most reprehensible crime, No, I don't think we can do that.'

'Then what do you propose?' exclaimed Phillipa, who was rapidly becoming too perplexed for her patience to bear. 'You come to me saying you can clear Sir Clinton, you tell me of these men, who seem to be the only stumbling-block, and then you say you can do nothing with them. Why do you not explain?'

Stead, who had risen when she did, and now stood on the hearthrug, looked across the table at her. It struck her afterwards, in reviewing the situation, that he was cooler and more imperturbable than ever at that moment.

'I have explained what I have,' he said, 'because I wished to make the situation clear to you. If these men rebut King's evidence, as they will, and nothing else is brought forward on Sir Clinton's behalf—as nothing else can be—Sir Clinton will infallibly be found guilty, if not of murder, most cer-

tainly of manslaughter. That is as certain as that we are here. Now, Miss Mannersley, do we speak in perfect confidence?'

Phillipa looked her astonishment at him without speaking.

'I mean,' continued Stead, without showing any discomposure—'I mean—do I understand that you will regard this conversation as being strictly private as between ourselves—that you will not breathe a syllable of what I say to anyone?'

Phillipa drew herself up proudly. She gave the cashier a glance which would have made any right-feeling man ashamed of himself. But Stead received it with his usual imperturbability.

'I have never been accustomed to revealing confidences, Mr Stead,' she replied, icily. 'It is not likely I should form such a habit now.'

'Just so,' he said. 'All the same, I should like you to give me your word that you will not divulge to anyone what I have said and wish to say to you. I know you so well that I am certain if you once give your word nothing could possibly induce you to break it.'

'Thank you,' she answered, half contemptuously. 'I should have thought that went without saying.'

'Then you give me your word?' he asked.

'I give you my word,' she replied.

Stead laid his hat, which he had all this time kept in his hands, on the table, and, leaning his knuckles on the table edge, bent forward and looked across it at her with an intense expression. As for Phillipa she, from some cause which she could not explain, felt inclined to shrink from him.

'Then listen!' he said, in a tense whisper. 'It does not matter what these men say as regards King—it does not matter what evidence is brought against Sir Clinton—I, and I alone, can save him!'

'You—only you?' she breathed, rather than spoke.

'Only I!'

'But why?' she whispered, leaning forward in her eagerness.

The answer came in a tenser whisper than before. 'Because I know who killed your father!'

Phillipa started back as if she had received a sudden blow. Then she drew nearer, and looked at the man with staring eyes.

'Who?' she said, with dry lips. 'Who?'

But the cashier shook his head. 'No,' he answered—' that is my secret, until the proper time comes. In the meantime I must know if you accept

my terms.'

'Terms?' she exclaimed; and suddenly she saw that something was to be paid, some bargain to be made, some sacrifice to be offered, before the man before her would speak. 'Terms?' she repeated.

'Precisely,' replied Stead, in his smoothest tones. 'And my terms are these—I agree at the adjourned hearing to reveal the truth, which will set your cousin free, on condition that you give me your word of honour (which I know you will not break) to marry me on the same day, which can easily be done by Archbishop's licence. I will show my faith in you by honourably fulfilling my part of the contract first; if I do not, you can repudiate yours. But I know you would keep your word.'

Phillipa felt as if the room were whirling round her. She felt herself clutching at the table; she heard what she knew must be her own voice, though it sounded a long way off.

'You must be mad—mad!' the voice was saying.

'On the contrary,' said the voice across the table, 'I was never saner. Come, Miss Mannersley, I have loved you for a long time, and I shall make you a better husband than a gambler, a spendthrift, and a convicted forger could ever do. Your father respected me, trusted me, invited me here as his equal. Besides, I come of good stock. If my father was poor, he was a gentleman and a clergyman, and I am well educated and well read. My character is unblemished, and—'

Phillipa found strength to lift a hand and wave it in entreaty. 'For pity's sake!' she said. 'Go, for pity's sake, if not for mine!'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I will go. But I shall return for your answer at this time tomorrow evening. And you will again see me alone.'

# 14
## The Cashier

It was already dusk when the cashier walked out of the Castle gates and turned in the direction of the mining village in the valley, but it was not so dusk that, had he looked in that direction, he would have failed to see a man emerge from the churchyard opposite, and, after a momentary hesitation as to whether to go up or down, proceed towards the lights below, walking for some little distance parallel with Stead himself, but gradually, because of his slouching gait, dropping behind and into the rear.

If Stead had looked at this man in that uncertain light, he would have been unable to identify him as a Mannersley Main man. But that would not have occasioned him any surprise, for the colliery was growing, and new faces were appearing in the streets by scores and dozens. He would have set the man down as one who wanted, or had perhaps found work at carpentering, or plumbing, or painting, or some similar job, and had come out for an evening stroll in his second-best suit and with his pipe, having as yet found neither mate nor sweetheart to keep him company. In no case would he have recognised him as Mr Perrett, who, as one of Inspector Cortelyou's faithful and trusted lieutenants, was keeping under various disguises and in his own inimitable fashion, a very pertinacious and sharp watch upon Mr Stead's movements.

Perrett slowly followed the cashier down the narrow lane which led from the old village to the new. Now and then they passed groups of miners; it was too dark for the miners to recognise the powerful colliery official. But when they came into the lighted streets of the new village, and Stead began to nod to people here and there, Perrett crossed over to the other side; so as to obtain a better view of anything that might happen. He was not afraid of losing sight of his quarry—he had followed a man for a whole day in the crowded London streets, and never allowed him to get out of touch with himself, and it seemed child's play to him to keep an eye on the cashier, who, so far, seemed to have done nothing out of the very ordinary—noth-

ing, indeed, except to go to the countinghouse at the colliery, and to the bank, and to his own house for meals and rest, and so on, and now, tonight, to the Castle. It was humdrum; but Perrett reflected that at any moment something might happen.

This particular evening more incidents seemed to be crowded into the cashier's prosaic promenade of the principal street; but they were, in Perrett's mind, of a distinctly domestic nature. Stead turned in at a fruiterer's shop, and Perrett beheld him go through the exciting process of choosing and buying a couple of chickens, which he carried away with him in a bass, evidently refusing a pressing and polite invitation on the part of the shopman to send the chickens to his house. Thence he repaired to a greengrocer's and bought some grapes—Perrett saw the greengrocer select a very fine bunch. Next the cashier visited a grocery establishment—what he bought there Perrett did not know, but the bass was now full. And thence he followed him to a wine and spirit merchant's. Stead came out of that with a bottle protruding from the side-pocket of his summer overcoat, and thereafter went straight along the street, as if he were going home.

Perrett's private impression was that the cashier was going to have a supper party, or enjoy himself at dinner tomorrow, and he began to think about his own supper. But in place of going straight home, Stead suddenly turned into one of the new streets which led towards the river, and at the foot of this turned again across a piece of waste land, at the farther side of which a row of cottages stood outlined against the sky. Here and there on the waste land, the last remnants of the coppices and hedgerows which had once covered it, stood isolated bushes—Perrett skilfully followed his quarry across the waste by means of these, and at last saw him approach one of the cottages, and, after a tap at the door, enter without further ceremony. And then Mr Perrett began to wish that he knew what was going on inside.

If he had been inside he would only have been surprised, for the cashier was visiting the cottage on an errand of mercy. It was an old-fashioned cottage—one of three or four which had been left amongst the fields by the riverside when the great colliery was made—and when he lifted the latch he walked into a raftered living room, with an open fireplace wide enough for half a dozen people to sit in. At that moment, however, there was nobody sitting there but a woman of rather over middle age, who, at Stead's entrance, rose and made him a curtsy.

‘Well, Mrs Hardacre,’ said the cashier, with a voice and manner which Phillipa, had she been there, would scarcely have recognised as those which had been recently used in her presence, ‘and how is the patient tonight? Better?’

The woman came nearer to the table on which Stead had set down the bass containing his purchases.

‘Why, Mr Stead,’ she answered, ‘he’s neither better nor worse. The doctor, he’s been in twice during the day—he was here not an hour ago, and give him something, and he’s left him a draught for the night—and, of course, he says, does the doctor, that the broken leg’s nothing, and the broken ribs not so much worse, though he doesn’t like them, ’cause of possible complications, as he calls them, but neither legs nor ribs bothers the doctor much.’

‘What does bother him, then?’ asked Stead.

‘He’s that restless,’ replied Mrs Hardacre, nodding in the direction of the stairs. ‘Me and the nurse has a fine time with him now and again, I can tell you I.’

‘Never been delirious, has he?’ asked Stead.

‘Never what you really call deeleerious,’ answered Mrs Hardacre. ‘No—shouts in his sleep now and then, but that’s natural to broken legs. I remember that when my poor mother broke her leg—you’ll not recollect her, Mr Stead, you being too young when you came here, but your good mother would—she used to talk and chatter in her sleep something curdling to the blood. It’s the pain as makes ’em do it, sir.’

‘You’ve never heard him say anything?’ asked Stead. ‘That is, anything definite?’

‘Nay, sir—they never do. It’s naught but a mumble, mumble, or a sudden shout,’ answered Mrs Hardacre. ‘They shout and call out, sir, when the pain tweaks ’em.’

Stead looked round the cottage. ‘I suppose the nurse is out?’ he said.

‘Yes, sir, she’s gone up to the village—she knows some people there. But she’ll not be long,’ added Mrs Hardacre. ‘It’s her turn to sit up tonight—it was mine last night.’

Stead began to unpack the contents of his bass and to lay them on the table.

‘Well, here are the things that were wanted, Mrs Hardacre,’ he said. ‘Here are the chickens to make the broth, and here are the meat extracts and the

jellies, and those are the groceries you said you could make him some light puddings from, and—I think that's all. Oh, here's the brandy; but mind, the doctor said you were not to use that except in case of any fainting or collapse.'

'Oh, I know, sir—we know what to do, me and the nurse,' said Mrs Hardacre. 'Of course, you know, Mr Stead, she's younger nor what I am, and she has the new-fangled ways; but we get on very well, sir, and we've had no disagreements, thank goodness!'

'No, that's not worthwhile,' said Stead. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out some gold. 'Well, here's a pound or two to be going on with, Mrs Hardacre,' he continued, handing it over to her. 'That's for yourself, you know.'

'Thanking you kindly, sir, and you're very generous,' said Mrs Hardacre. 'Depend upon it, sir, the poor gentleman shall have all the attention I can give him.'

Stead picked up the bunch of grapes, half-showing from its wrappings, and glanced at the stairs. 'I wonder if he's asleep,' he said. 'I should just like to see how he is.'

'Why, you'd do no harm by stepping up and seeing, sir,' said Mrs Hardacre. 'He does a deal of dozing, off and on.'

The cashier stole up the staircase as softly as a cat. Just as softly and quietly he turned the handle of a bedroom door and, entering, closed it behind him. Mrs Hardacre in the living room beneath heard no sound from above.

The room which Stead had entered was of considerable size; it filled, indeed, the whole of the upper storey of the cottage. The floor of plain wooden planks was bare of carpet or rug save in places, but was as scrupulously clean as soap and water could make it; the walls, colour-washed in a pale lilac tint, were destitute of picture or ornament save for a few texts printed in the midst of floral designs on strips of cardboard. The furniture was plain but neat; there was a scent of lavender in the room which seemed to add to its homeliness.

But Stead was noticing none of these things. He tip-toed across the floor to the side of the bed, which stood between the door and the window, and looked down at its occupant; and seeing that the occupant was asleep he remained perfectly quiet, watching him with speculative eyes.

The man who lay in the bed, muttering incoherently in his uneasy slumbers, was apparently of middle age and of over medium height. His head,

well-formed and handsome, was covered with a mass of hair which, originally dark in colour, was now thickly shot with grey; his beard, somewhat thin and straggling, was also rapidly grizzling, and had here and there a white hair in it. The face was thin, especially about the nose and the temples; and the eyes, around which were many wrinkles, were deeply sunk. As for the features, they were finely-modelled and intellectual. One hand, which lay outside the coverlet, was long and shapely, with the slender, tapering fingers of the artist or the inventor of delicate mechanism.

Stead remained at the bedside in an attitude of perfect quiet, until the man in the bed stirred restlessly, and at last opened his eyes with a murmured 'Who's there?' He seemed as if meditating a rising movement. The cashier laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

'Don't try to rise,' he said, soothingly.

'You've only just awoke. Lie still a, minute or two.'

The man turned his eyes on him with something like a frown, and then let his head drop back.

'Ah, yes,' he said, in a half-weary, half-irritable tone. 'I remember now. This confounded broken leg—and ribs too! Let's see, you're the doctor, aren't you? No, no—you're the other one, the one who's been kind. I'm much obliged to you, sir—you're very good.'

'Not at all—not at all,' said Stead. 'I'm glad to find you so much better tonight. See, I have brought some grapes for your acceptance. Let me break some off for you, they'll cool your mouth.'

The sick man eyed him wonderingly as he gave him some grapes one by one, and at last he passed his hand over his forehead with a half-impatient gesture.

'You're very kind,' he said again. 'It's queer that I can't—of course, I know that I've got a broken leg, and broken ribs, and that I'm amongst strangers and being very well and kindly looked after—but I can't remember how I got here. How did I get here, and where am I?'

'The doctor has given strict orders,' said Stead, 'that you are on no account to talk, or to be talked to, on that subject. You are to rest and be nursed, and you will be all right.'

The man's fingers toyed restlessly with the bedclothes. 'I expect I've injured my head somehow,' he muttered. 'Otherwise I'm all right.'

'Oh, you're all right,' said the cashier, reassuringly.

‘The last thing I remember,’ said the man, dreamily, as if he were half-asleep, ‘the last thing I remember—’

He paused, and Stead made no comment, although he was listening keenly for what the other might say. But the man laughed gently, as if amused at his own discomfiture.

‘It’s queer,’ he said, ‘but I can’t remember what is the last thing that I remember. Anyway, I’ve got smashed up somehow. Those are very good grapes. Thank you.’

Just then the nurse came into the room, and, after a word or two with her, Stead quietly took his departure. He said good night to Mrs Hardacre, and went out into the now dark night. And Perrett, who had kept a patient watch behind a convenient bush, once more dogged the cashier’s footsteps.

This time Stead went straight home. He lived not far away from the cottages he had just left, in an old house which stood near a disused lime quarry. He passed within its portals, and for that night Perrett saw him no more.

Once at home, Stead went to his private room and ate the simple supper set out for him. And that over, after some striding about the room, he went to a safe set in the deep wall, and, unlocking it with a combination key, took from it a brown-paper parcel, from which he drew an object that would have seemed of no significance to anyone but him, but which he knew to contain the real clue to the Mannersley mystery.

That object was—a man’s deerstalker hat.

# 15

## No Obligation!

When Marshall Stead left Phillipa Mannersley in the morning-room at the Castle, he left perhaps the unhappiest young woman in England behind him. For fully a quarter of an hour Phillipa remained where she stood by the table, drumming upon it ceaselessly with her fingers and staring at the vacant space where the cashier had stood. She could not realise what had happened. She had never liked Stead, but she had never actually disliked him. She knew that her father liked and trusted him, and that had been enough for her. But she had always had an uneasy feeling, an instinct, that there was something behind Stead's smooth and quiet manner; now that he had revealed himself to her, she knew him not only for a schemer, but for a villain. She felt the blood in her veins turn to fire and then to ice as she remembered what had just occurred—she—she was to be the price of this man's bargain! She felt shamed and humiliated to the very core.

And she had given him her word to keep confidence! She was to go about with this shameful secret, live with it, be with it always—that he was bartering his knowledge against her. She was to give her life, herself, her all to him in exchange for divulging a secret which, if he had been an honest man, would have been no secret. And she had given him her word—her word!

'Oh, if I only had someone to whom I could speak!' she said to herself. 'Someone to whom I could turn and tell everything I But—'

And then the dreadful truth forced itself upon her once more—she had given her word. And to a girl of Phillipa Mannersley's stamp, a girl who had been brought up with the strictest notions of honour, and who, moreover, had equally strict and natural notions of her own, the mere idea of breaking faith was as dreadful as the idea of high treason would be to an ardent royalist.

She knew little of sleep that night, and she could eat no breakfast next morning. The distant relative who was staying with her (she had no near relations except her cousin Clinton) was anxious and troubled about her, but

thought that she was still fretting over her father's death. But before she came down Phillipa had formed a resolution, and early in the forenoon she left the Castle to carry it out. She was going to ask advice on a question of conscience, and so she went across the road and through the churchyard to the Vicarage to find the old Vicar, who had known her ever since she was born, and had a great affection for her. Him she found in his study poring over one of his treasured books, and she plunged at once into the matter which had brought her there.

'Mr Scott,' she said, when she had dropped into her favourite chair at the old parson's side, 'is it ever right to break one's word?'

The Vicar pushed his spectacles high up on his forehead and looked at her as if he wanted to hear more.

'I mean under any circumstances,' she said.

'It is generally held that one should never break one's word under any circumstances whatever, my dear,' replied the old man. 'But,' he added, thoughtfully, 'I must confess that it has often occurred to me that there might be circumstances which would justify one in doing so.'

'Supposing,' said Phillipa, 'supposing you had given your word to somebody whom you subsequently found out to be very bad, very wicked indeed, and that that somebody ought never to have exacted your word from you—what then?'

The old Vicar took off his spectacles and polished them thoughtfully.

'You mean, I suppose, my dear, a case where one's word has been given under compulsion?' he said.

'Yes, yes!' exclaimed Phillipa, with great eagerness. 'Yes—that's it—under compulsion. Where you were made to give it, you know.'

'Under a threat of what might happen to yourself, or to some other person, to your or the other person's hurt?' asked the Vicar.

'Yes, yes!' replied Phillipa.

Mr Scott put his spectacles on again with calm deliberation.

'There is a certain school of theologians,' he said, with a sly smile which Phillipa did not understand, 'which would tell you that a promise made under such conditions is no promise at all; that a promise or vow exacted by threat, or compulsion, or necessity has no moral or religious obligation. And I am not sure that I do not agree with that school,' he continued, with a quiet chuckle. 'I am quite sure that if a man came in here and held a pistol to my head and threatened to shoot me unless I promised to give him his dinner

next Sunday I should certainly promise, but I should feel very reluctant to keep my promise.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you—you are always so wise!' exclaimed Phillipa, and darted out of the room as suddenly as she had entered it, leaving the old Vicar to wonder what was the matter with her. She ran across to the Castle and into the hall.

'I want the brougham at once, Dauncey, please,' she said. 'Tell them to be quick.'

Within a quarter of an hour she was driving down to the colliery. Naturally quick-witted and active, she had determined to lose no time in doing what she had made up her mind to do. And in the interval of leaving the Vicarage and getting into the brougham she had decided to tell Mark Quinton of all that had passed on the previous night between Stead and herself. She felt that of all the people about her Quinton was most to be trusted.

But Phillipa was not the girl to take a mean advantage. She was going to break her word to Marshall Stead, but she was also going to tell Marshall Stead what she was about to do before she did it. She would not speak behind his back. And so, when the brougham drew up at the offices of the colliery, and Phillipa stepped out, she turned to the countinghouse, and, entering the cashier's department, asked to see the principal.

There was scarcely a clerk in the countinghouse who could remember ever seeing Miss Mannersley there before, and the young proprietress of Mannersley Main was received as if she had been a princess. And Mr Marshall Stead himself came out all business, decorum, and politeness, and bowed her into the private office where Phillipa at one glance saw that they were alone.

'I do not wish to sit down,' she said, ignoring the chair which he placed for her. 'What I have to say will be said in a few words. I have come to tell you that I unreservedly take back that promise which I gave you—or, rather, which you forced from me—last night. I intend to make known all you told me—and at once.'

If a sudden explosion in the workings far beneath them had happened at that moment Marshall Stead could scarcely have been more astounded than he was. His usual sang-froid left him; he turned red and white, and finally a sickly grey; his mouth opened, and his face twitched.

'But—your—your word of honour!' he stammered.

‘You extorted my word from me in the vilest of fashions!’ she said, with blazing eyes. ‘I am advised that I am under no obligation to you to keep it. I am not going to do so. There is one thing more I have to say to you. After last night I know what sort of man you are. I will no longer have you in my employ. Mr Quinton will pay you a year’s salary—two—five—ten years’ salary, if necessary, and you will go!’

Stead had recovered himself by that time. He allowed a little of his true self to peep out.

‘So you mean your cousin to be hanged!’ he said, with the sneer of the man who suddenly finds that his game is up.

‘I would rather see my cousin hanged, drawn, and quartered than owe his life to a man like you!’ she exclaimed. ‘But I am not afraid, for now I do not believe your story!’

‘We will see,’ he answered, quietly. ‘You do ill to turn me into an enemy.’

Phillipa made no reply. But with her hand on the door she turned and looked at him.

‘Remember!’ she said, ‘I am mistress here. I will not have you in my employ one hour longer.’

Then she swept out, feeling very dignified and much older, through the countinghouse and round to the general offices, and there demanded the manager. And while she waited during the moment which elapsed before Quinton came to her, she realised that all the weight of the horrible night had dropped clean away from her.

If Mark Quinton was astonished to see Miss Mannersley at the offices so soon after her father’s death, he was much more astonished to hear the story which she poured out to him. It had seemed to her that she would never be able to tell it to a human soul; but her indignation against Stead had roused her to such a pitch that she told the manager everything without hesitation. And Quinton, who listened with his hands tightly clenched in his trousers pockets, heartily wishing that he could kick Stead all round the yard and then hand him over to the colliers, heard her out, and said nothing to interrupt her.

‘There is only one thing to do, Miss Mannersley,’ he said, when Phillipa had finished. ‘You must tell all this to the police. But after what has happened, it will not surprise me if Stead attempts to clear out. Now I have particular reasons why he should not clear out—at least out of Mannersley. The fact of the case is, between ourselves, I am going more closely into the

books of the colliery than has been done for years, and I do not want to lose touch of Mr Stead.'

'You don't mean—' began Phillipa.

'Never mind what I mean just now,' said Quinton, smiling at her in a reassuring fashion. 'Just excuse me a moment while I step into the outer office—there's a small matter I must attend to.'

Left alone, Phillipa, who had no mind to look at the illustrated paper which Quinton had handed her, reflected on the events of the last eighteen hours. She had been supremely miserable; she now felt, if not happy, at any rate immensely relieved. What astonished her was the conduct of Stead—that the mild-mannered, suave, studiously polite young man, who had always seemed the very pink of propriety, should suddenly show himself in such a new light, was to her a thing hard of understanding. She was still meditating on this curious psychological instance when Quinton came back, and, closing the door, stood with his hand upon the knob without advancing into the room.

'Here's a new development, Miss Mannersley,' he said. 'You know Jim Britten, of course. He has just brought one of the miners here—that big man, Moses Pogmore, whom they call Black Moses. He has a story to tell which bears a very significant relation to what you have just told me. Shall I bring them in?'

'Oh, do, do, Mr Quinton!' exclaimed Phillipa. 'Do let us hear anything!'

Jim Britten and Black Moses had evidently been in close proximity to the door, for they entered as soon as the manager opened it. Phillipa shook hands with Jim, and then with Black Moses, who had evidently considered the affair on which he had come so serious that he had put on his best clothes and a bowler hat which, being two sizes too small for him, made him look like an enlarged schoolboy.

'Sit down, Britten—sit down, Pogmore,' said Quinton, handing them chairs close to his desk, near which Phillipa was sitting. 'Now, Pogmore, I've just told Miss Mannersley that you've something to tell, and she wants to hear it. So fire away!'

Black Moses, who, like all the miners, had an admiration for Phillipa which bordered almost on worship, summoned up all his courage, and, after various preliminary groans and coughs, expressive of his sense of gratitude in being allowed to address such a young divinity, began to hold forth.

‘Well, ye see, missie, likewise mum, which I’m no great hand at tellin’ a tale, it were this way,’ he said. ‘Ye see, mum, I live, as Jim there knows, in that cottage in the old brickfield, and nat’rally, as no one else lives thereabouts, I’ve come to look on that there brickfield as the chap did what lived on the desert island—I disremember his name. And sometimes of an evenin’, there being nought to do, and happen not carin’ about the public-house, I take a stroll round the old buildin’s, as is now tumbledown—there’s a fine bit o’ ratting to be done in that brickfield, only just now I ain’t got a dog, more’s the pity—and sometimes I sits down and smokes a pipe here or there. And that’s how this here happened, sir,’ he said, turning to Quinton. ‘Weren’t it, Jim, as I told you?’

‘Yes that’s it,’ replied Jim. ‘Now then, go on, Moses. Tell Miss Mannersley what did happen.’

‘Yes, and please tell it just your own way, Moses,’ said Phillipa. ‘And if you want a dog to go after the rats you shall have one from my fox-terriers.’

Thus emboldened, and feeling more at his ease, Mr Pogmore proceeded to relate how that on the previous evening, after dark, he chanced to overhear a conversation between two disreputable fellows, Steve Gandidge and Jack Moorsom, with respect to a transaction which they two were having with Mr Marshall Stead, from which conversation it appeared that Messrs. Gandidge and Moorsom were to rebut the evidence of Ginger King, on lines supplied to them by Mr Stead; that during the intervening space of time they were to keep sober; and that when things were settled they were to receive so much coin of the realm from Mr Stead, who would further pay their passages to Canada. He also heard their evidence carefully rehearsed, one checking the other in the matter of times, and so on.

‘An’ that there is the gospelled truth, s’elp me!’ concluded Black Moses.

‘And if so be as I might come up for that there little dog, mum—’

When Jim Britten and Black Moses had gone the manager looked at Miss Mannersley, and Miss Mannersley looked at the manager. And suddenly, without a word, Quinton seized one of the many tubes lying on his desk.

‘Find out,’ he said, ‘if Mr Stead is in his room at the countinghouse.’

Within a moment the answer came back.

‘Mr Stead left the office some time ago, sir.’ Quinton laid down the tube and shook his head.

# 16
## The Deerstalker Hat

If Phillipa Mannersley had been surprised by Marshall Stead's conduct at the Castle, Marshall Stead was infinitely more surprised by Phillipa Mannersley's behaviour at the countinghouse. He was, in fact, so much surprised, that when she walked out with her cheeks aflame, her fine eyes blazing, and her head in the air, he felt as if he had been turned to stone, and for the moment stood staring at the door through which she had vanished with eyes which certainly did not see it or anything. If he had been a man of more perception, if he had understood the language of the prize-ring, he would have known that he was completely knocked out.

But the truth was that Marshall Stead, in spite of all his cleverness, was neither more nor less than that worst of all fools—a conceited one. He was sly, vain, and naturally bumptious; but he had early found out the advantages of concealing all sorts of feelings and qualities under a mask of smoothness. He had got round the late Sir Robert Mannersley by a consistent politeness, deference, and strict attention to business; he had won the applause of cost people by steady conduct and regular attendance at church. And he had gradually come to regard himself as so clever as to be able to deceive everybody.

That he had overshot his bolt in tackling Miss Phillipa Mannersley came as a regular revelation to him. He knew nothing, and never had known anything, of the world outside his own narrow limits; he knew just as little of women as he knew of the world. His mother, the only woman he ever had really known, was an old-fashioned, easygoing woman, whose sole idea, from the time he remembered her, was a perpetual devotion to the service of Sir Robert, who had so befriended her at a time of need. She was an easily-managed, soft-natured woman; when he himself had grown up he had bullied her. In his foolishness he believed that all women were like her; you had only to cow them, to let them see that you held the upper hand, and they would come to heel like curs who fear the whip.

And now to find that this girl—this proud young beauty, who he had fondly believed would agree to anything simply because he had threatened her, had dared to ignore the promise he had forced out of her, and had treated him as if he were mere dirt, was to him such a shock as he had never expected to receive. He had thought himself secure, simply because his cheap slyness had placed him in possession of a secret, and he had forced the pace. And now—

He shook himself together at last, and realised that he had made a mess of things. And at that he smiled, evilly.

'Never mind,' he said. 'She shan't have all her own way.'

Then, remembering that Phillipa had gone to Quinton, and knowing that Quinton now was in full possession of power, he bustled into activity. Putting on his light overcoat he hastily filled the inside pockets with certain papers and documents; he took a chequebook from a drawer of his desk, and within five minutes of Phillipa's departure from the room he, too, departed, and set off in the direction of the village. A new set of thoughts and feelings had suddenly entered into Stead's imagination; the ineradicable vanity in him was urging him to show the proud daughter of a long line of Baronets that whether she could keep her word or not, he, her summarily-discharged servant, could. And with that end in view he made his way to the house in which Inspector Cortelyou had taken lodgings—a course which he much preferred to living at an inn.

While Stead was thus journeying towards the queer little man from Scotland Yard, that astute personage was making a late breakfast, and at the same time interviewing Perrett. Naturally enough, the cashier was the subject of their conversation.

'Nothing much to do, eh, Perrett?' said the inspector, pleasantly. 'Ah, well, that's rather for me to decide, isn't it? What have you to report?'

Perrett pulled out a notebook and consulted some memoranda. 'I went on at noon when Stevens went off,' he said. 'Stead came out of the offices at the usual time—one o'clock; went to his lodgings to dinner; came back to the offices at three; left at six; went home again, and at seven came out and went up to the Castle; stayed there some time—' 'Some time? What time?' asked Inspector Cortelyou, sharply.

'Exactly three-quarters of an hour. Came out at eight-forty; walked down to mining village. I followed him—'

‘You might have left that out, Perrett,’ said the inspector. ‘You must have followed him or you couldn’t have kept an eye on him. Well?’

‘He called and made a purchase at a poulterer’s, a grocer’s, a greengrocer’s, and a wine-and-spirits,’ continued Perrett. ‘Went on carrying a bass, and had a bottle in his pocket; proceeded to some cottages on a waste piece of ground. I have subsequently ascertained cottages to be called Parker’s Lane. Went into the middle one—there are only three of them—remained there about twenty minutes. I saw his shadow against the blind in the upper room. There is only one upper room in each cottage. He came out and went home; this morning went to offices as usual.’

‘Ah!’ said Inspector Cortelyou. ‘Doesn’t sound very interesting or illuminating, does it, Perrett? Anything else?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied Perrett, ‘but I have made a separate note of it. About a quarter of an hour after he entered the cottage a woman in a nurse’s uniform came along and went in. I concluded from that and from the fact that he purchased chickens at one shop, grapes at another, and either spirits or wine at a third, and took them to the cottage, that there was somebody ill there.’

‘A very reasonable deduction, Perrett,’ said Inspector Cortelyou, pouring himself out fresh coffee. ‘It does you credit. All right—off you go—if I want you or Stevens I shall let you know in the usual way.’

Then the inspector turned to certain letters and documents, and Perrett went off. And if, on leaving the house, he had turned to the right instead of to the left, he would have met Marshall Stead, who a minute or two later came up, knocked at the door, and in his usual quietly-confidential manner, intimated that he desired to see Inspector Cortelyou.

The detective told his landlady to admit the visitor at once, and Stead came in, important and self-assured, but suave as ever. The inspector motioned him to a seat, and handed him a cigar case. Stead shook his head in some surprise.

‘Oh, no, it’s cigarettes that you smoke, isn’t it?’ said Inspector Cortelyou, and produced a box. ‘Help yourself, sir.’

Stead took a cigarette, and looked surprised. ‘How did you know I smoked cigarettes?’ he asked.

‘By your fingers,’ replied Inspector Cortelyou. ‘I noticed them in court the other day. It’s my way to notice everything. Well, what can I do for you, Mr Stead?’

Stead, feeling somewhat nonplussed by the detective's cool reception, was slightly embarrassed. 'The fact is, inspector,' he said, 'I—I called to speak to you about the murder of my late friend, Sir Robert.'

'Aye, just so,' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'I knew that, of course. And what about it, Mr Stead? Have you anything to tell me?'

'If I chose I could tell you a great deal,' replied Stead, who felt more and more nettled. 'I came to tell you something.'

'Then I shall be very glad to hear it,' said the inspector. 'Come, sir—I am known to be rather eccentric in speech and manner. If you can assist me, pray do so. I shall be obliged to you.'

'Well, inspector,' said Stead, somewhat mollified by this, 'it will be in your recollection that on the night of the murder I called at the Castle, and went into the library to wait. Now, for purposes of my own, I did not tell all I might have done at the magisterial inquiry.'

'Ah! indeed?' said Inspector Cortelyou.

'No. When I entered the library,' continued Stead, 'I immediately noticed that one of the windows opening on the lawn was open. They are French windows, as you know, opening down to the ground. That on the right hand side was open, and the blind, slightly drawn, was flapping. I crossed over and closed it, and drew down the blind.'

Inspector Cortelyou took out a notebook.

'You don't mind if I make a memorandum of what you tell me?' he said. 'It will, of course, be useful.'

'Oh, by no means!' replied Stead. 'I intend, of course, to relate all this at the adjourned hearing, but I wish you to know now.'

'Just so,' said the detective, who had been writing. 'Pray proceed, Mr Stead.'

'Well,' continued Stead, 'in turning from the window I noticed something lying on a chair. Something, you understand, unusual!'

'Ah! Unusual in that place—the library? And what was it?' asked Inspector Cortelyou, busy with his pencil.

'It was a deerstalker hat.'

Inspector Cortelyou continued to write for a moment or two without looking up or betraying any undue interest.

'A deerstalker hat? Ah! probably one of Sir Robert's,' he said.

'No,' replied Stead, who scarcely understood the detective's manner. 'It was certainly not one of Sir Robert's! It was an old, much-worn, rather

greasy hat—not at all the sort of thing that Sir Robert would have worn. It had been a good hat—it bore the name of a good maker—Heath, of Oxford Street.'

Inspector Cortelyou smiled. 'You would have been a credit to my profession, Mr Stead,' he remarked. 'You know how to notice little things. Pray proceed.'

'Well,' continued Stead, who drank in compliment of any sort with avidity, 'after—after the discovery of the dreadful event—'

'You mean Sir Robert's murder?' interrupted the detective, shortly.

'Yes, after that—and, of course, when the natural flurry had subsided—I remembered the hat,' said Stead, 'and I went back to the library and put it in my pocket and took it home.'

'Mention it to anybody?' asked Inspector Cortelyou.

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I have always made it a rule,' answered Stead, 'not to tell my business to anyone until the right moment comes.'

'A very excellent rule. Go on,' said the inspector.

'I come to the next point of my story,' continued Stead. 'I do not know whether you are aware of the exact position of my residence—I shall be pleased to see you to a cup of tea there one of these days—but close by it is a quarry which has long been out of use. It is very badly fenced in, and at one part the railings are broken down. There are no lights about there, and a stranger wandering about or losing his way could easily fall over the edge. Now, on the night of Sir Robert's death—'

'Murder!' corrected the detective, laconically.

'As I was returning home,' Stead went on, ignoring the interruption, 'I heard groans proceeding from this quarry as from someone in great pain… The quarry lies between my house and some old cottages which were left in the fields when the colliery was laid out. I procured help from the cottages, and a lantern, and went down into the quarry. There I found a man lying at the foot of a steep wall of rock over which he had evidently fallen. He was groaning, but unconscious. As soon as I saw him I recognised him.'

Inspector Cortelyou looked up with quickened interest. 'Ah! you recognised him!' he exclaimed. 'As whom?'

'As a certain Dr Julius Steinthal, from London, who for many years had from time to time pestered Sir Robert with a scheme for neutralising the ef-

fect of after-damp in the case of an explosion, and had given him a great deal of annoyance,' answered Stead. 'In fact, lately he had scarcely left Sir Robert alone; and though Sir Robert did not believe in the invention or scheme, Steinthal's letters became almost threatening. My own impression is that he is not quite sane.'

'Well, you found him in the quarry—what then?' asked the detective.

'I had him conveyed to the cottage of a woman who goes out nursing and has a room to spare, Mrs Hardacre,' answered Stead. 'I sent for Dr Hibbert and a nurse. The doctor found that Steinthal had broken a leg and some ribs, and that there was some injury to his head. As a matter of fact, he has lost his memory.'

Inspector Cortelyou closed his pocketbook with a snap. 'He is still, then, at the cottage?' he said.

'Oh, yes, and is being well looked after,' answered Stead. 'He can't get away.'

'Now then, what is your theory?' asked the detective.

'I believe he killed Sir Robert,' replied Stead, slowly. 'He had no hat or cap when I found him—the deerstalker fits him; moreover, I have seen him in it, for he has visited Mannersley several times. He knew the Castle well—my theory is that he obtained admission through that open window, and left by it after he had committed the murder.'

The detective, who had put on his hat and picked up his umbrella, nodded. 'I'm very much obliged to you, Mr Stead,' he said. 'You are helping considerably to clear matters up. Now, you won't object to walking down to the station with me? we must tell this to Illingworth.'

'Oh, not at all!' replied Stead. 'I am glad to be of help. Anything to clear Sir Clinton of this dreadful charge.'

He accompanied Inspector Cortelyou to the station and into Illingworth's room. The latter looked at them in surprise—Inspector Cortelyou gave him a look and a wink. And somehow the little man from Scotland Yard managed to get between Stead and the door. He suddenly spoke, and his voice sounded strangely different.

'Now, Mr Stead,' he said, 'it's no use mincing matters. Quite apart from what you've told me this morning, all of which I can quickly verify for myself, Mr Illingworth and I were going to call on you a little later, as we wished to see you on an important matter. However, here you are, so

we needn't waste time. The fact is, Mr Stead, we hold a warrant for your arrest.'

Stead, who had been staring at the detective as if he were trying to make out the sudden change in his voice and manner, started back. 'A warrant—for my arrest?' he exclaimed. 'But—but on what charge?'

Inspector Cortelyou rapped out the answer in one word. 'Forgery!'

# 17
## The Three Signs

The two police officials watched Marshall Stead carefully as Inspector Cortelyou uttered the word which signified so much; each, in his separate fashion, was wondering how the cashier would take the news. Illingworth, having had but a limited experience, and not being over imaginative, was full of curiosity. The man from Scotland Yard had seen too much of life, as it related to his own profession, to attach much importance to the first signs shown by a man suddenly charged with a serious crime, but on this occasion he watched the effect of his announcement with lynx-like eyes. He was prepared to see anything.

What the two watchers did see was first a blank stare of utter astonishment and next a rapidly-increasing look of incredulous wonder pass across the accused man's face. He looked from one to the other, as if he could not comprehend the meaning of what Inspector Cortelyou had said; then he smiled, as if some joke or trick were being played upon him.

'You don't mean that?' he said.

Inspector Cortelyou regarded him steadily. 'That is exactly what is meant, Mr Stead,' he replied. 'We don't deal with these things in a joking spirit.'

'But this is nonsense!' exclaimed the cashier. 'Utter nonsense! I suppose you've got some definite charge against me?'

'It would be utter nonsense if we hadn't,' replied the detective. 'We not only have a definite charge but a definite warrant—you'd better charge him,' he continued, turning to Illingworth, who immediately produced a document from a drawer. 'Sit down, Mr Stead—there's no need to stand.'

The inspector himself sat down, and, producing his cigar case, began to smoke. But Stead, noticing everything without seeming to do so, observed that the chair which his captor dropped into was between the door and himself. And he knew that he was as safely trapped as if he were locked up in the big safe at the office.

Illingworth, solemn and stolid, gave the prisoner the usual warning, and read over the charge. It was not a lengthy one, and the terms were plain and simple—perhaps too much so to the man who listened to them. Stead was charged with forging a cheque for seven hundred and fifty pounds, purporting to be drawn by Sir Robert Mannersley, and with converting the proceeds to his own use. The date of the transaction was about ten days before the murder.

Inspector Cortelyou watched the accused man's face very closely while Illingworth's monotonous tones were heard. He saw a subtle, almost indefinable change come over it, and for one brief second he detected a flash of genuine surprise in Stead's eyes. And the man from Scotland Yard said to himself: 'He's surprised at the things coming to light, and, by heaven, he's guilty!'

Stead coughed slightly as Illingworth came to an end. He had taken a seat at Inspector Cortelyou's invitation, but he now rose and began slowly, but with steady fingers, to button his light overcoat.

'Of course, that's all nonsense!' he said. 'Well, I suppose I shall have to appear before the magistrates?'

'And without doubt before a judge,' replied Inspector Cortelyou, dryly.

Stead pulled the last button into place, and moved a step towards the door. 'Very well,' he said. 'I shall be there whenever you want me.'

Inspector Cortelyou, without moving from his chair, smiled sardonically. 'I don't know whether you think you're trying to bluff us or whether you're charmingly simple, Mr Stead,' he remarked. 'Don't you understand that you're a prisoner?'

Stead looked from one to the other, and changed colour. 'That I—that I am to be detained?' he asked.

'Certainly! You are going to be locked up, after you have been searched,' answered the inspector.

'I wanted to go to my lodgings,' said Stead, slowly. 'Can't I go if you, or both of you, accompany me?'

'No!' answered Inspector Cortelyou. 'I'm going there myself—I hold a search warrant.'

Then Stead showed the first sign of collapse. He dropped into the chair from which he had just risen and became silent. The detective nodded to Illingworth.

‘Get through with the searching,’ he said, in a low voice. ‘I want to see what he has on him and then to get off.’

And within five minutes Marshall Stead, having been relieved of his papers and anything which it was considered undesirable for him to have, found himself locked up, to reflect upon recent events.

Inspector Cortelyou hastily looked through the papers in Stead’s pocket-book. They were few in number, and to an inexperienced eye would have seemed quite unimportant. There were two or three letters of a private nature, a few receipts, and some newspaper cuttings. But on the newspaper cuttings being opened out they all proved to be in reference to betting transactions on current races, and Inspector Cortelyou smiled grimly.

‘Appropriate sort of literature for a Sunday School teacher and churchwarden, eh, Illingworth?’ he said.

‘A bit queer, certainly,’ agreed Illingworth.

‘You’d have looked to find a few tracts, eh?’ continued Inspector Cortelyou. ‘Well, that seems all. Hullo—here’s something else! What’s this?’

He drew out from an inner pocket a scrap of paper a few inches square, which had been folded up in the shape of a triangular note. On opening this some curious hieroglyphics appeared, at which both officials gazed with wonder and speculation, not seeing any reason in them. An oblong frame had been drawn on the paper and in its midst were three signs, thus:

‘That refers to something or other,’ said Inspector Cortelyou. ‘Here, I’ll make a sketch of that, Illingworth, and then you can lock all these things up. Not much, but those betting figures suggest a good deal, and this diagram may yield something.’

With his sketch of the diagram in his pocket, and his cigar in his mouth, Inspector Cortelyou went out into the street and set off in the direction of the house where Stead lodged. And as he came to the outskirts of the mining village he encountered Mark Quinton, who, having seen Phillipa Mannersley safely into her carriage, was on his way to consult somebody, he scarcely knew whom, about the cashier. His face brightened at the sight of the little man with the wrinkled face and queer attire.

‘Ah, inspector!’ he said. ‘I’m glad to meet you. I was just wanting someone to whom I could turn for advice. The fact is—’ and he gave the detective a concise account of what had occurred at the offices that morning, in-

cluding Phillipa's story of the events of the previous evening. Inspector Cortelyou listened in silence and with an imperturbable countenance.

'What do you think of that?' concluded the manager. 'Queer, isn't it?'

Inspector Cortelyou flicked the ash off his cigar. 'I think,' he said, 'that it's just what I expected to hear, or something very like it. However, there's no need for anybody to be concerned about Mr Stead at present. We've got him.'

Quinton looked his astonishment. 'You've got him?' he said. 'Got him where?'

The detective poked his old umbrella in the direction of the police station. 'There!' he said. 'Locked up.'

'Locked up!' exclaimed Quinton. 'But—on what charge?'

'At present,' replied Inspector Cortelyou, 'on the charge of forging Sir Robert Mannersley's name to a cheque.'

'Ah! then you have discovered something?' said Quinton.

'Yes, and a good deal,' replied the detective. 'I'm just going on to the house where Stead lodges. If you'll walk a little way I'll tell you all about it. You see,' he continued, as they turned back together, 'as I told you the other day, I had suspicions of Stead for strong reasons. Now, a very little accident yesterday afforded an immense illumination on the case. You will remember that from the night of Sir Robert's murder until now the study and library have been rigorously sealed up, so that no one should have access to them but the police, which means practically Illingworth and myself. For many reasons this was necessary, but especially for one—that the mass of papers lying in, on, or about Sir Robert's desk should not be touched. Now, Illingworth and I have carefully gone through all those papers as we have found time to do so, but it was not until yesterday that we came to the end of our search—an end in a double sense. We found what I had been certain we should find—a clue. And where do you think we found it?'

He paused and, lighting another cigar, gazed up at the tall manager with a quizzical expression.

'I haven't the remotest idea,' said Quinton. 'Where?'

'In the big wastepaper basket that stood on the right-hand side of Sir Robert's chair,' answered Inspector Cortelyou. 'Likely place, wasn't it? But I've known less likely—lots of 'em, in fact.'

'And this clue,' asked Quinton, eagerly 'what was it?'

‘It was two clues, as a matter of fact—a sort of two corroborations of one undoubted fact,’ answered the detective. ‘As I say, we had examined everything—Illingworth, as you may be aware, is a bit new to such a job and required watching—and had found nothing, and so I began an inspection of the contents of the wastepaper basket, which, as you know, is an extra-sized one.’

‘Just so—just so!’ exclaimed Quinton, excitedly. ‘And there, no doubt, you found something which you pieced together?’

Inspector Cortelyou laughed. ‘No, no!’ he said. ‘And I’m glad I didn’t—it takes a long time to piece scraps of letters together. No—I found two letters, enveloped and sealed; one of them was stamped for post, the other was not. The stamped envelope was addressed to the manager of the Stelford Banking Co., Limited; the other to Mr Marshall Stead. That one was endorsed, “To be handed to Mr Stead on his arrival.”’

‘Go on—go on!’ said Quinton, eagerly.

‘I took it upon myself to open those letters,’ continued Inspector Cortelyou. ‘The one to the bank was a brief letter of a few lines; that to Stead was a lengthier document, and it contained Bank of England notes for a hundred and fifty pounds. And in those two letters, Mr Quinton, unless my professional experience is at fault, I learnt what I believe to be the truth of all this strange mystery.’

‘And that is—’ said Quinton.

‘That Stead is a consummate scoundrel,’ answered Inspector Cortelyou, ambiguously. ‘I won’t say more at present. But I have copies of the letters in my pocketbook. I’ll read them to you.’

Drawing out his bulky, much-worn pocketbook, the detective produced and unfolded two sheets of paper. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is the letter to the bank manager. It runs:

‘CASTLE,
‘JUNE 2ND, 19—

> ‘DEAR SIR,—Until I call upon you personally, which I shall do within the next three days, be pleased not to honour any cheque drawn upon my private account bearing date later than May 28th inst. Yours faithfully,

'ROBERT MANNERSLEY.'

'And this,' he continued, 'is the letter to Stead, from the same address and of the same date. It's a sad letter, in my opinion.

> 'DEAR MARSHALL STEAD,—Although I telephoned to you requesting you to call here tonight, I feel that I cannot see you, and I am therefore writing this note, which will be given to you. I have suddenly discovered by accident, but on the most indisputable evidence and surest proof, that you have forged my name to a cheque for £750. There is no doubt of your guilt, and my discovery has led me to a train of sad thought. I am not sure whether the hand which forged this cheque may not have been the same which forged that in respect of which my unfortunate nephew has suffered.
>
> 'For the sake of your dead father and mother, I cannot bring myself to prosecute you. But you must go. I enclose a banknote—why, I don't know, for I dare say you have feathered your nest well. Go at once—anywhere—and try to be honest because I have been merciful. I felt for you as a father, and I am trying to act as your own father would have acted—mercifully.
>
> 'ROBERT MANNERSLEY.'

Inspector Cortelyou folded up these papers amidst his own and his companion's silence. Each man felt as if he had listened to a voice from another world.

'If Miss Mannersley hears that letter,' said Quinton at last, 'it will almost break her heart.'

'Aye, sir, but it will soon be mended,' answered the detective. 'Joy is stronger than sorrow, and love than grief. And now I must get on with my duty. You'll see and hear more before the day's over.'

Then he went forward on his mission, and Quinton turned back to the village.

# 18
## The Roll-Topped Desk

The woman in whose house Stead lodged—an old-fashioned farmhouse, which was one of the few ancient abodes left in the valley—looked askance at Inspector Cortelyou when she answered his knock at her front door. His rusty tall hat, his unusually old-fashioned garments, his Mrs Gamp-like umbrella, made her consider him a suspicious character, and she only opened the door to the extent of a very few inches as she inspected him.

'Good morning, ma'am,' said the detective, blandly and genially. 'It is a beautiful morning. Mr Stead, of course, is not at home.'

'No, he isn't,' answered the landlady.

'Just so, ma'am,' said the inspector. 'I did not use those words, ma'am, in the form of a question, but as an assertion. Mr Stead is not at home. The fact is—though I don't want to shock your nerves, and I am sure I shan't, as I see you are a sensible woman—the fact is, Mr Stead is locked up.'

The landlady looked her scorn and disbelief, and made as if she would shut the door in Inspector Cortelyou's face. But the detective, after a fashion peculiarly his own, had already insinuated himself as far as the doormat, and the woman, suddenly seeing him determined, drew back.

'I don't believe it!' she exclaimed. 'The mere idea of a highly-respectable gentleman like Mr Stead being in prison—a churchwarden!'

'Ah, my dear lady, I've seen a good many churchwardens sent to prison!' said the detective. 'Yes, and clergymen, too. Mr Stead, my dear madam, is arrested and is locked-up at the police station till he can be brought before the magistrates, and, in the meantime, I've got a warrant, which you can see if you wish, to search his rooms in your house. I'm Inspector Cortelyou, of Scotland Yard—here's my card.'

The landlady sank into a chair close by and grasped her apron convulsively. 'You're the detective, then, that—that came down about the—the murder?' she said, gazing at Inspector Cortelyou with frightened eyes. 'You—you don't mean that he's arrested for that?'

The inspector gave her a keen look. ‘Why, is he anything to you?’ he asked, suddenly.

‘No,’ she said, shaking her head, ‘no—nothing. But I knew his mother—I served under her at the Castle. Oh—I hope it isn’t that—Sir Robert was always so good to them both, and especially to him.’

‘Well, it isn’t that—yet,’ replied Inspector Cortelyou, reassuringly. ‘He’s arrested for forgery, that’s all. And, of course, he might get off, so there’s no need for you to distress yourself. And now let me have a look at his rooms, there’s a good soul—I’m a busy man.’

The woman led him along the hall to a sitting room at the rear of the house—a room of some size, from which two French windows looked out upon a garden and orchard. It was a pleasant room, furnished after the style of an old-fashioned farmhouse parlour, and had little attempt at ornament or decoration. There were a few old steel engravings and some older coloured prints on the walls, and a few books were arranged in a glass-fronted bookcase in one corner, but the detective looked in vain for any particular signs of personality or for the things which a bachelor likes to gather about him. Everything was very neat, formal, and precise, just like Stead’s attire.

‘I expect everything in here is your property?’ he said, turning to the woman, who stood in the doorway holding the corner of her apron to her mouth, and watching him wonderingly as he looked about him. ‘Furniture and so on, I mean?’

‘Oh yes, sir,’ she answered. ’At least all but that desk there in the corner. Mr Stead brought that with him when he came. All else is ours—my husband’s and mine.’

‘Then I’ll look at the desk,’ said Inspector Cortelyou. ‘And as I see it’s your washing-day I won’t detain you. I’ll leave the door open, so that I can call you if I want you.’

The woman looked at him wonderingly again, and went off down the passage. Inspector Cortelyou drew out a bunch of keys which had been taken from Stead’s pocket during the search, and approached the desk—an American roll-top desk of good make and some capacity, which was fitted with a patent lock. He found the key and threw the top back, and began his search.

At the end of an hour Inspector Cortelyou, relocking the desk again, had to confess to himself that, with the exception of one object, he had found nothing. The desk was a model of neatness, and whatever papers were in it

were all docketed and arranged in the most precise order. But those papers threw no light on the matter which concerned the detective. There were private letters from friends; there were receipts for accounts paid; there were memoranda relating to church and Sunday School matters—everything was of this simple sort. There was nothing that gave him any clue.

The object which he thought worthy of attention was the deerstalker hat, of which Stead himself had told him. He looked it over, and found that it corresponded exactly to Stead's description of it. Yes—just the thing that Stead said it was, and there was the maker's name which he had mentioned 'Heath, Oxford Street.'

'He told me the truth there, anyway,' muttered the detective, and laid the hat aside to take away with him. Then he looked round the room. With the exception of a sideboard there was nothing in which anything could be hidden, and that contained nothing but the usual silver, glass, and china necessary for a bachelor.

In deep thought, Inspector Cortelyou approached one of the French windows and looked out. It gave upon a kitchen garden in which things were looking bright and promising. He passed on to the next window; that opened on a little orchard with a tumbledown wicket-gate, a wealth of much too overgrown grass, and an old draw-well, surrounded by a low, moss-covered wall.

'Pretty place, pretty old place,' mused the inspector, 'but I'm doing no good here.'

He went out into the passage and called for the landlady, who at his request took him up to Stead's bedroom. He looked all over that, examined Stead's personal belongings, looked into drawers and cupboards, and came out no more enlightened than when he went in. And, saying good day to the landlady, and taking the deerstalker hat with him, he went off to the cottages where Stead had told him the man whom he had rescued from the quarry was lying ill. He was revolving certain problems within his own mind as to that matter, and he wanted to find out two or three things for himself.

From his first observations there was no doubt that Stead had told him a true story with respect to the beginnings of this second mystery. For here was the deerstalker hat in his hand, and there was the quarry from which Stead said the man had been carried. He went to the edge at the spot where the broken fence was, and looked over; it was a fairly steep drop to the bot-

tom of the quarry, and it seemed to him a wonder that the man had not been killed outright, until he espied an outgrowing bush of bramble, which had doubtless broken his fall. And still ruminating on this event, and wondering if Stead really did find the hat in the library at the Castle, he went forward to the middle cottage in the little row of three.

If Inspector Cortelyou had found it a fairly easy task to enter Stead's lodgings, he found it a very difficult one to get into this cottage. Mrs Hardacre happened to be standing at the open door of her dwelling as he entered the little garden, and she immediately prepared to play the part of faithful watchdog, which Stead had impressed upon her. She was a big and brawny woman, of undoubted muscle and sinew, and she planted her hands on her hips and glared at the detective as he came up the path. Inspector Cortelyou scented trouble.

'Good day, ma'am,' he said, with great suavity.

'Day,' responded the guardian, with asperity.

'You have, I understand, a man lying here who is ill,' said Inspector Cortelyou.

'Well, and what if I have?' demanded Mrs Hardacre. 'What business is it of yours, I should like to know?'

'Merely,' replied the inspector, assuming a more professional tone, 'merely, ma'am, that I have called to see him.'

Mrs Hardacre snorted with defiance.

'Have you?' she said, decisively. 'Well, then, you can go back to wherever you came from, 'cause you won't see him. There!'

The inspector gazed at her Most people felt cowed by that special look; Mrs Hardacre did not.

'I am a detective officer from Scotland Yard,' he began, 'and it is my duty to—'

'I don't care if you're the Duke of Scotland; you're not coming into my house!' exclaimed Mrs Hardacre. 'And you're not going to see my patient. And here's the doctor coming this blessed instant, and if you don't go he'll make you.'

Inspector Cortelyou turned with relief to see Dr Hibbert, whom he already knew, driving up the lane in his dogcart, and he at once went to meet him. A short colloquy at the garden gate, during which the irate lady in the doorway perceived the young doctor to show several signs of surprise, resulted in the two men approaching her.

‘Good day, Mrs Hardacre,’ said the doctor. ‘This gentleman is Inspector Cortelyou, of Scotland Yard. I am going to take him upstairs with me to see our patient.’

But the wardress still showed signs of disapproval. ‘It’s against orders, doctor,’ she said, grumblingly. ‘Mr Stead gave the strictest orders, as you know very well, that there wasn’t nobody whatever to come in to see this man without his permission.’

‘Quite so,’ agreed Dr Hibbert; ‘but I’m afraid Mr Stead can’t be relied on any more. The fact is, Mr Stead’s in prison.’

Mrs Hardacre’s manner underwent a sudden change. ‘Stead in prison!’ she exclaimed. ‘Well, and I’m none surprised after his mysterious goings on. Lawks-a-massy! And who’s going to pay me in future, I should like to know, for keeping this here strange feller in my cottage? To be sure, Stead’s paid up to now, but who’ll do it till he can be moved? And I’d like to know who he is, an’ all?’

‘That, ma’am, is precisely what I am here to find out,’ said the detective. ‘And as to your being paid, you needn’t distress yourself about that.’

He followed Dr Hibbert up the staircase and into the bedchamber, where the nurse whom Stead had secured came forward to meet them. She raised her hand.

‘He’s sound asleep, doctor,’ she said. ‘He’d a restless night, but he’s been sleeping beautifully since noon.’

‘Let him sleep as long as he can,’ said the doctor. ‘Has he spoken of remembering more yet?’

‘No, sir,’ replied the nurse.

Dr Hibbert signed to the detective to go up softly to the bed. Inspector Cortelyou went there with the softness of a cat, and gave the patient a swift inspection. Then, beckoning to the doctor, he went downstairs again to the garden, where a moment later Hibbert joined him.

‘Well?’ asked the doctor.

‘Yes, that’s Dr Julius Steinthal,’ said Inspector Cortelyou. ‘I recognised him at once. He was once called as an expert in a case in which I was concerned. I’ll wire to his people at once. Now about his loss of memory; what is it exactly? A temporary loss?’

‘Exactly,’ replied the doctor. ‘A temporary loss caused by some sudden violent shock.’

‘Do you think that fall over the quarry caused it?’ asked the inspector.

‘I don’t know, because the injuries to his head were slight, very slight indeed,’ replied the doctor. ‘It may have been the result of a great mental shock.’

‘In either case,’ asked the inspector, ‘do you think his memory will come back to him?’

‘Yes, certainly,’ replied Dr Hibbert. ‘I fully expect that it will come back just as suddenly as it went. A sudden shock might possibly restore it. But it will come.’

‘Then see that these women keep a strict watch, and make them see that they must communicate with you and me immediately he shows any sign of the return,’ said Inspector Cortelyou.

He then said good day to the doctor and set off towards the village. But he had scarcely crossed the waste land on which the cottage stood, when he saw Perrett running towards him. At a few yards’ distance Perrett cried his news—

‘Come to the station as quick as you can, sir!’ he exclaimed. ‘Stead’s made his escape!’

# 19
## Dogger Tandy

Mr Marshall Stead, left to himself and his own thoughts in the solitude of a not too spacious or comfortable cell, felt that the situation in which he now found his hitherto confident personality placed was one which had great disadvantages. Until that moment he had never upon any occasion known what it was to be nonplussed; full of resource all his life (or, at any rate, since his schooldays), he had invariably converted every situation to his own good. He was sure now that he could make something out of this, if only he could regain his liberty. But the walls of his cell were as thick as those of the old Castle, to all appearance; the window was a mere pain of dull glass covered with iron bars; the door looked as if it would never open again under any circumstances. Obviously, Mr Stead was in what is vulgarly called a tight place; but being philosophic, he sat down on his stool—which was all that was provided to sit on—and considered matters.

And, after all, he reflected, with a species of interior mirth, they could not get at his money. He had always had too much sense to keep any considerable sum of money in any local bank, beyond a sum of about a hundred and seventy pounds lying at call in the bank not twenty yards away from where he was sitting, a captive; all his worldly wealth was in London and elsewhere—in other names. If he could only get out and get away from Mannersley—! He felt inclined to curse or to kick himself for not clearing off immediately after the scene with Phillipa. But how could he know what was coming? Even now he could not understand—understand, at any rate, how these confounded people had found out. While he sat there meditating, the door of his cell, after the loud turning of a key, was suddenly opened, and a young constable, whom Stead remembered as a boy, looked in upon him somewhat shamefacedly. Stead saw that this youthful person was full of amazement and wonder to find the cashier of Mannersley Mine, the churchwarden of Mannersley Church, locked up like any common drunk or

casual criminal. Indeed, from force of habit, the policeman touched where his helmet should have been.

'Beg pardon, sir,' he said, 'but the superintendent he said as how I was to ask you if you'd like some dinner ordered in from somewhere. I could slip across to the Grapes, sir, and get you a chop or something, if you like.'

'Yes,' answered Stead. He put his hand in his pocket, in which they had left him such cash as he had about him, and drew out half a crown. 'Yes, I should like a chop and potatoes and a little cheese and a glass of ale. Get yourself a drink with the change.'

'Thank you, sir,' said the officer, taking the money. 'Sorry to see you in this place, Mr Stead,' he added, with a clumsy attempt at sympathy.

'It's all a foolish mistake, for which somebody will have to pay heavily,' replied Stead. 'By the by, is Mr Illingworth anywhere about?'

'No, sir,' said the officer. 'There's nobody about just now but me and Police-Constable Stevens in the office—they're all gone to dinner. Is it anything Stevens could do, sir?'

'No, no, it doesn't matter,' answered Stead. 'I only wanted to ask Mr Illingworth a question. I'll see him this afternoon.'

The young officer went away, promising to bring the chop as soon as possible, and Mr Stead resumed his meditations. What a thing it was, he thought, to be so near liberty and yet so far from it, and what a difference a locked door made! If only he could get outside that door!

And then a sudden thought came to Mr Stead, which made him jump from his stool and begin to pace the narrow confines of his cell with rapid strides. He knew the exact geography of the police station, for he was friendly with the architect who built it, and had often been over it with him in the process of building. He knew that the cell in which he had been placed was the last of a series of four in a passage which terminated with a door at the back of the police station; if he could once get out of his cell into that passage the opening of the door would be a simple matter. And once outside—The thought of liberty, even though he had only lost it for little more than an hour, was so alluring that it braced his nerves like a strong tonic. He buttoned up his coat and prepared for action, reckoning up his plan of campaign. To leave that cell was the thing, but to leave the young constable within it was the step to be achieved. Once out of the cell he would be safe—for a while. Police-Constable Stevens in the office in front would know nothing and hear nothing—for a while. He would try.

The young constable was coming back at last—Stead heard his feet on the flagged floor of the passage. He took up a position behind the door, and braced up all his nerve and strength. He heard the rattle of glass and silver on the luncheon tray; he heard the key turned in the lock; he knew that the officer was leaving the key in the lock, and that, being encumbered with the tray, he was pushing the door open with his knee. In another instant he appeared—and in that instant Stead leaped upon him, sent him and the tray rolling in hopeless confusion on the floor of the cell, darted out, turned the key in the lock, and in another minute was outside the rear of the police station.

He stood for a moment to regain his breath, and then, pulling himself into his usual cool and calm manner, and following out the plan which he had determined upon, he deliberately turned the corner of the police station, and, emerging into the main street, walked boldly into the little local bank, which occupied the next building. Just as he had surmised, there was nobody there but a clerk, who greeted him in all innocence.

'Good day,' said Stead, replying to the youth's salutation. 'I want some gold, and I find I've forgotten my chequebook. Just give me a blank form, please.'

His hand was quite steady as he wrote out a cheque for one hundred and fifty pounds, and he chatted pleasantly to the clerk as that sum was counted out and handed over. He dropped the paper bags into which he had directed the gold to be put into his pockets, and with a quiet farewell walked calmly out of the bank and into the main street again.

'Lucky for me it's dinnertime,' he thought. 'That's step number two. Now for number three.'

Mr Stead's step number three was to walk round the corner of the bank, and to make a sharp turn into a cul-de-sac of red-brick cottages which lay at its rear. There was not a soul to be seen in the forlorn little street, and without a moment's hesitation he went straight to one of the first houses, and, dispensing with the ceremony of knocking, opened the door and walked in.

This cottage was one of several which belonged to Stead in Mannersley. It was a typical miner's cottage, having a living room in front, a kitchen at the back, and two sleeping chambers upstairs. Such a cottage in the hands of home-loving and careful tenants, not overburdened with children, could be kept neat and clean, as was the case with the great majority of the cottages in Mannersley. But this cottage was tenanted by one of Mannersley's

greatest ne'er-do-wells—a miner who was known by no other name than Dogger Tandy, probably because, whatever the state of his worldly affairs might be, he could always show a good greyhound, which he fed on mutton chops while his unfortunate wife munched a dry crust. And Dogger Tandy was in Stead's debt, and was a desperado, and his cottage was handy, and Stead was a firm believer in the saying that if you want to hide the best hiding place is next door to the man who is seeking you, and so to Dogger Tandy he came.

When Stead walked in it was to survey a scene which, if not absolutely squalid, was sordid in the extreme. The carpetless living room, though not destitute of furniture, was nearly so, and there was scarcely an article which had not suffered such primitive repairs as can be effected by tying up broken limbs with string or driving a nail through parts where nails should not be required. A primitive meal of bread, cheese, and pickled onions was set out on a carpetless deal table, and was flanked by a can of ale. There was an odour of onions, of cheese, of acrid tobacco smoke in the place that smote keenly on Stead's nostrils. For one moment a sense of degradation in having to seek shelter in such a house smote him, but it left him just as quickly. He closed the door behind him and faced the occupants of the cottage.

Dogger Tandy, a big, bony, red-haired, sharp-eyed, sharp-nosed man, with a thin beard and ragged moustache, through which protruded ugly yellow fangs of teeth, sat on one side of the table with a greyhound at his knee. He was eating bread and cheese with a clasp-knife, and every now and then applying his moustache to the rim of an ale can. His wife, a poor, washed-out, downtrodden-looking creature, whose face bore more than one mark of her lord and master's fist, appeared to be chiefly solacing herself with dry bread and weak tea, drawn from a pot which had doubtless stood on the hob since breakfast time. Both started at Stead's abrupt entrance. It was not his practice to collect his rents in person, and they could not think of any reason for his presence there. And the man scowled, and his scowl was very suggestive of the way in which a vicious dog shows his teeth. He half-rose from his chair, and regarded Stead with anything but friendly eyes.

'If so be as you've called about that bit of rent, master,' he began. 'It's not—'

Stead stopped him with a lifted hand. 'I've not come about any rent,' he said. 'You're welcome to what's owing. I want to talk to you. Send your wife out of the room for a few minutes.'

‘Get outside!’ commanded Dogger Tandy to his spouse, pretty much as he might have ordered a cur to its kennel.

But Stead barred the way. ‘Not outside,’ he said. ‘Can’t she go into the back place, or upstairs?’

Mrs Tandy retired hastily into the back place and closed the door. Stead glanced at it suspiciously.

‘There’s no way out of that, is there?’ he asked.

‘As they’re your houses, guv’nor, you ought to know there’s no door in ’em except such as you’re a-standing against,’ answered Tandy. ‘Course there isn’t!’

Stead came farther into the kitchen and took a chair close to the miner’s, who continued to watch him furtively.

‘Look here,’ said Stead, eyeing Tandy keenly, ‘do you want to earn some money? Not a pound or two, nor twenty pounds, but a nice lump.’

Dogger Tandy regarded him with the eyes of the naturally suspicious man. He kept silence for a minute. ‘What’s the game, guv’nor?’ he asked. ‘You can speak free—she’ll not hear.’

Stead explained matters, not caring in his present predicament to mince them. He knew his man—knew that Dogger Tandy’s cupidity and greed would make him keep a still tongue in his head; he also knew that Tandy was not a drinking man, so would not talk in his cups; he also knew him to be a master of craft and ingenuity. And he told him everything, while the miner listened in silence.

‘Now listen, guv’nor,’ he said, when the fugitive had made an end of his story; ‘this here is a ticklish job, but you’ve come to the right man to do it. It’s a thousand to one against their ever looking for you here. You did it smart in coming next door, as it were. But they’ll set all their wits to work on you, d’ye see? They’ll watch the station and the roads. Now, I’ll tell you what must be done. Do you stop here quiet this afternoon, while I go out and about and keep my ears open and my mouth shut. That’s the ticket. And then we can see what to do.’

‘But supposing anybody comes in?’ said Stead. ‘And then, what about your wife?’

Dogger Tandy smiled at these difficulties with great contempt, and solved both a few minutes later by interviewing his wife in the back place and locking her up there, after which, bidding his guest help himself to the bread and cheese, and further producing a bottle of stout for his delectation,

he took his greyhound and locked up the house behind him, leaving Stead a prisoner for the second time in one day.

It was dark when Dogger Tandy returned, bringing with him some eatables which he thought Stead might fancy. He looked grave, and he shook his head.

'It's a bad lookout, guv'nor,' he said. 'I thought they'd kick up a rare shine over it. They've got the bills out already, and they're watching the station here and all around. There's only one thing I can see of.'

'What's that?' asked Stead, eagerly.

'Well guv'nor, it's this,' replied the miner. 'You know the old Wellington working, what hasn't been used for a couple of year? I know a way into that from our seam, and you could lie snug there for a day or two in the old underlooker's office, with plenty of grub and so on. I can rig you up like a collier, and get you down there with me on the nightshift—they'll never dream of looking for you there. It's the only way, guv'nor—you'll have to hide below ground for a time.'

And Stead saw no other alternative.

# 20
## The Dead Man's Letter

In the whole course of his professional career Inspector Cortelyou had very seldom lost his temper and allowed himself to be startled out of an equanimity which came naturally to him, but when he fairly understood Perrett's news, and grasped the fact that Stead had made good his escape, he became so angry that his subordinate felt thankful that he himself was not to blame.

'Knocked down the man who carried in his dinner, locked the cell door on him, and walked quietly out!' vociferated the little man. 'Fools—asses—idiots! Where had they all gone to?'

'Don't know, sir,' answered Perrett, with a discreet cough. 'I heard something about them being away at their dinners—they do things so queerly in these country places, sir.'

'Dinners!' exclaimed the inspector, with deep scorn. 'I wish their dinners had choked 'em—I haven't ever thought of mine yet. Come on!'

He marched off to the police station at a rate which obliged Perrett, who was nearly twice his height, almost to run in order to keep up with him, and fell upon Illingworth and his myrmidons as if he meant to slay them there and then.

'Here's a nice state of things!' he said, coming into their midst. 'I take the trouble to catch a man and turn him over to you, and then you let him go as soon as my back's turned!'

'It's all this man's fault,' said Illingworth, pointing with lowering brows at the youthful constable, who, half-confused with fright and shame, and with a bandaged forehead, consequent upon his having received a nasty cut from the broken crockery into which Stead's sudden assault had pitched him, stood close by, 'all his fault. He should have had more sense.'

'Well, sir, you told me to get him his dinner, sir,' pleaded the culprit. 'I only obeyed your orders, sir. I never expected that a gentleman like Mr Stead would behave in that way, sir. I'd got my hands full with the tray, sir.'

‘Bah!’ said Inspector Cortelyou. ‘What’s the good of all this? Get to work, Illingworth, and let’s see what we can do. He can’t have gone far—it’s impossible.’

Never, from the time it had been a police station, had that of Mannersley known such activity as it was there and then plunged into. All its available men and Inspector Cortelyou’s three satellites were pressed into service and made to move at a rate they had never known. The telephone was never at rest; the neighbouring railway stations were all warned, the neighbouring police notified, and by the middle of the afternoon the billposters were posting up small bills all over the place. And soon after they had made their appearance in walked the bank clerk who had paid Stead the gold, and told his story of that episode of the day’s proceedings.

Inspector Cortelyou heard him in silence. ‘And pray what time was that—to the minute, if you can be sure of it?’ he asked.

The bank clerk was sure of it—absolutely sure—for he happened to notice the clock as Stead walked out. Twenty-five minutes to two to the minute by the bank clock.

‘And what time was it when you let him get away?’ demanded the inspector of the unfortunate young constable, who by virtue of his wound had been permitted to remain in the police station instead of being hurried about. ‘Can you be sure? Don’t go making any mistakes, now!’

‘It was just half-past one, sir,’ answered the constable.

The inspector glanced at Illingworth. ‘He’s a cool customer,’ he said. ‘He must have walked straight into the bank as soon as he got out. I suppose you don’t know which way he went,’ he continued, turning to the clerk—‘up street or down street?’

But the clerk knew nothing as to that. And as the hours went by no news came in of Mr Marshall Stead; and the wounded constable, who was very sore in more ways than one, gave it as his private opinion to a sympathetic comrade that Stead had had a confederate somewhere at hand waiting with a motorcar, and had took his hook on the instant.

Inspector Cortelyou was fuming and fretting in Illingworth’s office that evening, waiting for news of the fugitive which seemed to be never coming, when a policeman ushered in Fisher, the footman from the Castle, and intimated that he had brought a message.

‘Yes?’ said the inspector, who was in no mood to be disturbed. ‘What is it?’

Fisher, who had been regarding with wonder the unusual surroundings in which he found himself placed, made the great man from Scotland Yard a formal bow.

'Miss Mannersley's compliments, sir, and would you be kind enough to come up to the Castle, sir?' said Fisher. 'I have brought the brougham down for you.'

Inspector Cortelyou growled a little. He had the greatest respect and even affection for Miss Mannersley in a fatherly way, but when he was on one job, and concentrating on it, he did not like to be called off to another.

'What is it?' he said. 'Anything really important?'

'Miss Mannersley said, sir,' answered Fisher, 'that it was of the highest importance.'

'All right, I'll come,' answered the inspector. 'I'll get back as soon as I can, Illingworth,' he remarked as he went out. 'They'll drive me back.'

It was nearly dark when Inspector Cortelyou reached the Castle. His mind had been fixed the whole way on the problem of Stead's disappearance. He had no idea that he was to be brought face to face with a further mystery.

Fisher led him straight to the morning-room where, sitting round a table on which stood a small box of japanned tin, such as men of law are supposed to keep deeds in, sat Miss Mannersley, Quinton, and a grey-haired gentleman whom the inspector had never seen before, and who was introduced to him at once as Mr Barnwell, the late Sir Robert's solicitor. Phillipa pointed Inspector Cortelyou to a seat by her side.

'I am so much obliged to you for coming, inspector,' she said, 'because you are so clever at solving mysteries, and another has sprung up this evening which I cannot solve. You see, Mr Barnwell and Mr Quinton came to see me on business, and it was necessary to see if there were any of my dear father's papers which had not been examined yet. I knew of nothing except this box, which he always kept on his dressing table. I had not liked to open it. You will understand why. But these gentlemen thought it had better be opened, so I fetched it down here and opened it. The first thing I saw was this letter, which, you will see, is addressed to me, and was written only a month ago. I have so much respect for you and so much confidence in you, inspector, that I will give you this letter to read. Mr Barnwell and Mr Quinton have both read it.'

Inspector Cortelyou took the letter with one of his old-fashioned bows, and, putting on his goggle spectacles, went over to the hearth to read it. And this is what he read:

> 'My Dearest Love,—For some time, I do not know why, and it may be a mere foolish fancy on my part, I have had a strong premonition that I have not long to live, and that the end may come suddenly. Everything then, will, of course, fall into your hands, and I have seen enough of your good qualities to know that you will faithfully and well and wisely administer the very great wealth which will come to you.
>
> 'As you know that the small deedbox which I always keep on my dressing table contains my most private papers, I apprehend that in the event of my sudden death you will open it without delay. That is the reason why I am placing this letter in it. I pray God for both our sakes that there may never be reason for you to find it! But the premonition I have spoken of is there, and I must make proper provision.
>
> 'What I want to tell you is this: About six months ago I purchased a collection of diamonds, which were once the property of a famous French Queen—-never mind which. There is no ill-fortune attached to them. My object in buying them was to give them to my dear daughter on her twenty-first birthday. Now, it is naughty to tell the price of a present to the person to whom the present is given, but you will understand that I must tell you—-well, not the price, but the worth of these diamonds, as determined by the best experts. They are worth thirty thousand pounds.
>
> 'Now, if anything should happen to me suddenly, wear these diamonds, and remember the pleasure that it gave your father to buy them for the dearest daughter in the world.
>
> 'The diamonds are in the drawer marked "A" in my safe in the library. They are as safe there as they would be if they had been lodged in a bank. My Phillipa's loving
>
> 'Father.'

Inspector Cortelyou came quietly back to the table, and as quietly laid the letter by Phillipa's side.

'Thank you, Miss Mannersley,' he said. 'Well?'

'Well, inspector,' said Phillipa, 'you may be sure that this letter was a great surprise to me. I immediately showed it to Mr Barnwell and to Mr Quinton, and they agreed that the first thing to be done was to open the safe in the library. As you and Mr Illingworth have now removed the seals from the doors that was possible, and we went there at once, and I opened the safe with the key which was found on my father's private bunch. We opened the drawer referred to-—the one marked "A." And we found it empty.'

The solicitor and the manager were watching the detective narrowly. But Inspector Cortelyou showed no sign except one of polite interest, and it was a full minute before he spoke.

'Well, Miss Mannersley,' he said at last, 'it is highly probable that your father transferred those diamonds elsewhere. He may have reconsidered matters, and sent them to his bank.'

'In that case,' said Phillipa, promptly, 'I should have learnt of the fact from the bank before now.'

Inspector Cortelyou smiled. 'True,' he said, 'so you would. But there are other places to which your father could have transferred them.'

'That,' said Mr Barnwell, 'is precisely what I said to Miss Mannersley. There are safe deposits, for instance, in which Sir Robert may have placed them.'

But Phillipa shook her head. 'No,' she said, with decision. 'For in that case my father would have altered the last paragraph of this letter. He was the most methodical of men. No, those diamonds have been stolen-—stolen!'

What was the queer-looking little detective thinking of? His face had suddenly grown animated, his eyes began to blaze; he clapped his right hand to something in his breast pocket and jumped to his feet.

'Let me see that safe!' he said. 'Come—quick!'

They all set off to the library. Quinton got there first and switched on the electric light. Inspector Cortelyou hurried up to the safe, and Phillipa brought out her bunch of keys. But the detective almost pushed the girl aside.

'No, no!' he said. 'No-—wait!'

He drew out of his trousers pocket a bunch of keys, and, selecting one-—a curiously-fashioned thing-—inserted it in the lock. The safe door swung slowly open amidst the exclamations of Phillipa and the two men.

'There!' said the detective. 'Those keys were taken from Marshall Stead this morning. He's got the diamonds, and I've a pretty good notion, now, though I hadn't five minutes since, where they are.'

# 21
## The Deposition

The inspector set off for the hall door and the motor brougham which was awaiting him there, with such haste that he had already taken his seat when Quinton caught him up.

'May I come with you?' he asked. 'I dare say I shan't be in the way, and, in any case, you are going in my direction.'

'Come, by all means,' answered Inspector Cortelyou. 'I have told the man where I want to go. You may come with me if you like.'

'Yes,' said Quinton. 'Where is that?'

'I am going to Marshall Stead's lodgings,' replied the detective. 'And I hope I may find those diamonds there.'

'You do?' exclaimed Quinton, half incredulously. 'You really think he got them?'

'Certainly. I figure it out this way,' said the inspector. 'Stead, from all I can learn, was very much in the late Sir Robert Mannersley's confidence. In fact, he seems to have treated him more like one of the family—-almost like a son, in fact.'

'Yes,' said Quinton. 'Yes, that is so.'

'What more likely, then, than that the Baronet should take him into his confidence about those diamonds?' said the detective. 'It is extremely likely that he would do so. What is absolutely certain is that Stead provided himself with a duplicate key of the safe, as you have just seen. All this is only serving to elucidate a mystery which is apart from the murder.'

'You said just now that you knew where the diamonds were,' said Quinton. 'Does that mean—'

'Ah, I spoke rather hurriedly,' interrupted the inspector. 'I ought to have said that I have a very good idea where they will be found; as Stead was arrested and locked up very suddenly, I don't think he'll have had time to move them. I believe I shall find them in the orchard at his lodgings.'

'What, planted?' said Quinton.

‘Just so,’ replied Inspector Cortelyou. ‘And I believe that a certain diagram now in my pocketbook refers to the exact spot. It’s a very curious thing, but a lot of men like Stead, if they secrete something of value, cannot refrain from making a more or less elaborate diagram of its whereabouts, and preserving it instead of trusting to memory. Now, in this case—’

And he proceeded to tell Quinton about the diagram, and by the light of the carriage reading lamp showed it to him.

‘In that orchard,’ he said, ‘there is a disused well; that circle evidently represents it. The orchard has a tumbledown wicket-gate: these strokes evidently represent that. I believe we shall find the diamonds hidden between the well and the wicket-gate.’

Quinton made no answer to this; it seemed to him that Stead might have found a much more likely place wherein to bestow the stolen diamonds, and that he was more the sort of man to place them in a bank than in a hole in the ground. But he reflected that Inspector Cortelyou was an astute man, who had good grounds for whatever he believed, and he looked forward with interest to the next stage of the matter.

The inspector had ordered the motor brougham to stop at some distance from Stead’s lodgings; he wanted, he said, to approach the house quietly.

‘There ought to be a man of mine somewhere about,’ he said, as they drew near the garden in front of the house. ‘I’ve had the place watched ever since I heard of Stead’s escape, because I’d an idea he might come here. And now that I know about the diamonds, I shouldn’t wonder if he does.’

A man’s figure suddenly rose out of the darkness from behind a clump of laurel.

‘That you, Perrett?’ asked Inspector Cortelyou. ‘Anything happened?’

‘No, sir,’ replied Perrett. ‘Nothing’s happened.’

‘Well, I’ll send someone to relieve you presently,’ said the inspector. ‘I must have an eye kept on this place all night. In the meantime, you can borrow a lantern from the house and bring it round to the orchard at the back—there’s something there I want to examine. Come this way, Mr Quinton—we needn’t trouble the house people.’

The inspector led the way round the house to the little orchard which lay in front of the windows of Stead’s sitting room.

‘Now, here’s the gate,’ he said, laying his hand on the crazy wicket. ‘You’ll see when Perrett brings that lantern that—’

He stopped, suddenly grasping Quinton's arm. In the darkness, soft and clinging, of the summer night they saw a man rise as it were out of the ground in the centre of the orchard and move swiftly away.

'Stop him—stop him!' exclaimed the detective, rushing forward. 'Get to him, Mr Quinton—you're more active than I am. Hi, Perrett, Perrett!'

The figure in front crashed through the fence at the opposite side of the orchard and was gone. Quinton, at the first word from Inspector Cortelyou, had darted forward; strong, athletic, and in good trim, he meant to run the fugitive down. But in the darkness he caught a foot in the hedgerow and fell heavily; when he rose, the quarry, judging by the sound of his footsteps, was a long distance across the field behind the orchard. He ran on, the inspector and Perrett toiling in his rear.

The field ended in a long, narrow wood, beyond which, as Quinton knew, lay the river. It being then the height of summer, the trees were in full leaf, and would have made excellent cover even in broad daylight; at that hour it was, of course, impossible to see anything. The three men paused at the edge of the wood and listened intently.

'There's not much chance of getting him here,' said the detective, peering about him in the darkness. 'He can hide easily enough amongst these trees. Did you hurt yourself in that fall, Mr Quinton?'

'I dare say I've barked some skin off my leg,' answered Quinton. 'It feels like it. I should have had him if it hadn't been for that hedge.'

'Do you think it was Stead?' asked the detective, still hanging about the edge of the wood as if loath to leave it.

'No,' answered the manager. 'It was not Stead—I'm certain of that. It was a much bigger man than Stead in every way.'

'Well, we might as well go back and see what he was after,' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'He was up to something, and we can't do any good here. Hurry on, Perrett, and get that lantern.'

When they reached the orchard Perrett had procured a lantern, and Inspector Cortelyou proceeded to examine the ground lying between the little wicket-gate and the old well.

'Here you are!' he suddenly exclaimed, drawing his companions' attention to a small cavity in the soil, by the side of which lay a small gardening trowel. 'What luck! If we'd only been ten, even five minutes sooner. That's where those stones have been planted, Mr Quinton, and whoever the man that we followed just now is, he's in collusion with Stead and knows

where Stead's got to. Confound it!—I'd have given a pension to lay hands upon him.'

At that moment a voice sounded from the road outside the orchard.

'Is Inspector Cortelyou there amongst you?'

'Yes,' answered the inspector. 'Who's that?'

'Mr Illingworth sent me to find you, sir,' replied the voice of the young constable upon whom Stead had successfully carried out his plan of escape. 'Dr Hibbert wants you urgently at the cottage where the strange man's lying, sir.'

Inspector Cortelyou muttered something to himself and left the orchard, followed by Quinton and Perrett.

'Where is Dr Hibbert?' he asked the constable.

'Gone on to the cottage, sir. He begged you would join him there at once,' replied the man.

'You don't know what he wants?' asked the detective.

'Well, sir, I heard something said about the man's having come to his senses, and something about a confession, but Mr Illingworth hurried off,' the constable said. 'I think they're going to take his depositions, sir, because Mr Chalmers, the magistrate, has gone down.'

'All right,' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'You can come with me if you like, Mr Quinton; it's only round the corner of the waste. Now, Perrett, you know what you have to do, and where you can find me if you want me.'

He moved swiftly away in the darkness, and Quinton, after a word to the driver of the motor brougham, whom they passed at the end of the lane, followed him. Inspector Cortelyou was unusually quiet, but he spoke on coming within sight of the lights in the cottage window.

'I wonder what we are going to hear now?' he said. 'I have come across this man Steinthal before. I was once mixed up in a case with him. He is a bit of a crank, and I should say not too well balanced, and, like all of a certain class of inventors, he could be awkward to deal with.'

'I have heard of him, of course,' said Quinton. 'He used to pester Sir Robert a good deal.'

Dr Hibbert was awaiting them at the cottage door. Within stood Illingworth and an elderly gentleman whom Inspector Cortelyou recognised as one of the magistrates whom he had seen on the bench. Hibbert came forward.

‘I am glad you have come,’ he said. ‘The patient has come to his senses, and wants to see you. By some means or other he managed to fall out of bed this evening in the momentary absence of the nurse, and the shock has restored his memory. But there is another complication—his heart is seriously affected, and I am afraid of collapse. He is very urgent that a magistrate should take his depositions, and Mr Chalmers is here, ready to do so, but the man won’t speak until he has seen you. So will you come up with me?’

Inspector Cortelyou followed the doctor upstairs to the sleeping chamber which he had previously visited. The sick man was lying in an attitude which suggested indifference as much as weariness. He looked apathetically at the detective as he walked gently up to the bed, and greeted him in an unconcerned voice.

‘They told me that you were here, Cortelyou,’ he said, ‘and I thought I would rather speak first to you of what I have to say than to strangers. You know how I came here?’

‘Yes,’ answered the inspector. ‘You fell over a quarry, and had a nasty accident, and lost your memory.’

‘Yes,’ answered the patient, with a grim smile, ‘and this evening I fell out of bed and bumped my head, and that has brought my memory back. Oh, yes, I remember everything now. But I want to make a deposition before a magistrate, Cortelyou—it will clear matters up.’

‘But why such haste?’ asked the inspector.

‘Simply because I am going to die,’ answered the man. ‘You look incredulous; but I know! Now, there’s just one thing I want you to do for me. Hand me that waistcoat, if you please.’

The detective handed him the garment he pointed out, and from one of the pockets he took a piece of folded paper, from which he produced a pawn ticket. This he passed over to Inspector Cortelyou.

‘This refers to a case of mathematical implements of some value; you will see where they are pawned,’ he said. ‘But inside is the formula of a new explosive. As I am going to die, you can hand it over to any of your chief men interested. It will revolutionise warfare. Now let me see the magistrate.’

At the detective’s signal Dr Hibbert fetched up the three men waiting below, and at the sick man’s wish Illingworth immediately began to take down his deposition. It was not long, but to those who heard it possessed a deep

significance, and it made Inspector Cortelyou think a good deal about certain conclusions to which he had come.

'My name is Julius Steinthal, and I hold several degrees from German and English universities,' dictated the patient. 'I have taught science in both countries, and at one time was well off. Lately I have been extremely poor, and, having no friends, I have lived in the Rowton lodging houses. I have no property.

'During the last year or two I have vainly endeavoured to sell to some great colliery proprietor a new patent of immense value. I particularly brought this invention before the notice of Sir Robert Mannersley, with whom I have, in better days, stayed as a guest. I considered that he treated me with neglect. Finally I raised money and came to Mannersley, to make a personal appeal to him. I chanced to meet him near the Castle. He absolutely declined to entertain my offer, and was very haughty towards me. I wandered about in the fields until nightfall, and then, being desperate, resolved to make a last appeal to him. I approached the Castle by the lawn, and knowing the place, entered by the open library window. I entered his study he received me coldly, but on hearing that I was in want sat down to write me a cheque. I was standing behind him; a dagger which he used as a paper knife lay close by. I was suddenly seized with ungovernable fury, and I picked it up, plunged it into his back, and rushed from the house. After that I do not remember anything until this evening. But this is the truth. I killed him in a fit of sudden madness.'

There was a deep silence while Steinthal made his confession, and it lasted until after he had formally signed it. And when that was done, Inspector Cortelyou, making a sign to Quinton, went quietly out of the room and into the night. A certain theory of his had been upset, and he was now on the edge of a new field of discovery.

# 22
## The Free Pardon

Both Quinton and the detective were very quiet as they went back to the motor brougham, and for some time neither man spoke. Then the manager said:

'I suppose you do not wish to go up to the Castle again tonight, and I don't think I shall. It's getting late, and there's no need to trouble Miss Mannersley with all these horrors before morning.'

'Just so,' agreed Inspector Cortelyou. 'There isn't.'

'Then we'll get the driver to take us to my rooms, and you shall have a whisky-and-soda and a cigar,' said Quinton. 'You look tired.'

The detective made no secret of the fact that he was tired, and when they reached the manager's rooms he dropped into a chair as if glad to rest.

'I'm not only tired,' he said, as he took the tumbler which Quinton had mixed for him, 'I'm disappointed. I fully expected to hang Marshall Stead.'

'That's a truculent remark, isn't it?' said Quinton, smiling.

'Not from a professional point,' answered the inspector. 'No; I had fully made up my mind that Stead was guilty.'

'You quite believe Steinthal's confession, then?' asked Quinton.

Inspector Cortelyou nodded as he lighted a cigar. 'Quite,' he said. 'Quite. Oh, yes, that's the truth. And now, of course, putting a lot of things together, I begin to see how things really were, and how skilfully Stead turned them to his advantage.'

'You mean that you can reconstruct the crime and the surroundings of that evening?' asked the manager.

'I think so. Stead doubtless arrived in the library immediately after Steinthal rushed from it,' answered Inspector Cortelyou. 'The open window and the deerstalker hat gave him an idea that something was wrong. My own belief is that Steinthal left the study door open, and that Stead saw what had happened and closed it. I also believe that it was during the next few minutes that two things happened. One was that it was then that the fin-

gerprints were made on the secret staircase, into which he looked to see if anybody was concealed there; the other, that it was then that he abstracted the diamonds from the safe in the library.'

'What! After Sir Robert's death?' exclaimed Quinton.

'Certainly! It was a grand double chance for Stead. Sir Robert's murder relieved him of an always possible danger—the danger of detection as regards his figures (for I have no doubt we shall find that he has been a most accomplished hand in that direction)—and it also gave him the opportunity of annexing the diamonds, which Sir Robert had doubtless shown to him. I have no doubt whatever that Stead had those diamonds in his pocket, Mr Quinton, when he came into the study in response to your call for help. Ah! I wish I could lay hands on him.'

'He surely can't be far away,' said Quinton. 'He can't have got off from any of the neighbouring stations, and if he's walked across country he's sure to be recognised.'

'Aye, if we could only have caught that fellow who was in the orchard tonight!' said the detective. 'Or rather, if we could have followed him, I'll wager anything he'd have led us straight to Stead. Stead's lying hid somewhere about.'

'Until he can get off, I suppose,' said Quinton. 'Of course, I don't know anything about such things, but it seems to me that it's quite easy for a man to wait until nightfall and then to go quietly away from a place.'

'It all depends on his appearance, his behaviour, and his supply of ready cash,' replied the inspector. 'But Stead hasn't gone away from Mannersley yet, sir—he's somewhere about. We shall find him yet—and those diamonds too. That's all I care about now—I've lost all interest in the other case.'

'Dr Hibbert, sir,' announced Quinton's landlady, ushering the young doctor into the sitting room.

Hibbert came in, looking tired and fagged, and nodded to both men. He drew off his gloves and laid them on the table.

'Help yourself to whisky-and-soda, Hibbert,' said Quinton. 'There are cigarettes. I know you don't smoke cigars.'

'I'll smoke a pipe,' said Hibbert. He mixed himself a drink, and swallowed half the contents of the tumbler absent-mindedly. 'I say,' he continued, looking round at the others, 'Steinthal's gone!'

Inspector Cortelyou showed no sign; Quinton looked perplexed.

‘Gone?’ he said, inquiringly. ‘Gone?’

‘Dead!’ answered Hibbert, laconically. ‘Just after you left.’

The detective puffed out a cloud of cigar smoke and looked at the doctor attentively.

‘How was it?’ he asked.

Hibbert sat down and lighted his pipe; it was plain that he had been upset. ‘After you went,’ he answered, ‘Chalmers and Illingworth and I went downstairs. Of course, Illingworth knew Steinthal couldn’t move or anything, and he wanted to consult with Chalmers about some formality or other. I didn’t understand, but they wanted me. I wasn’t away from him more than seven or eight minutes, but he was just dying when I got back. Suicide, of course.’

‘Suicide?’ exclaimed Quinton.

‘Cyanide of potassium,’ answered Hibbert. ‘It was impossible to do anything. He must have had it concealed somewhere, but I can’t think where, unless it was in a hollow tooth.’

Inspector Cortelyou thought of how the man’s claw-like hands had fingered the old waistcoat, and he said nothing.

‘Well, I’ll go,’ said Hibbert, finishing his whisky-and-soda. ‘I thought I’d just drop in and tell you.’

There was a short silence after the young doctor had gone. The detective seemed in no mood for conversation, and Quinton watched his wrinkled face with some curiosity.

‘I suppose this will lead to Sir Clinton Mannersley’s release, inspector?’ he remarked at last.

‘Oh, yes,’ answered the detective. ‘Of course—of course. That was only a question of time.’

‘It is a pity that the other affair—you know what I mean—still hangs over him,’ said Quinton.

Inspector Cortelyou smiled oracularly. ‘When I catch Marshall Stead,’ he said, ‘that charge won’t hang over him. Stead was the man.’

He rose to go, saying that he still had work to do.

‘Well, matters are clearing up, at any rate,’ said the manager, shaking hands.

‘Wait till I catch Stead,’ answered Cortelyou.

But on the morrow, and the next day, and the next, no news came to him which brought him any nearer the fugitive. The Mannersley mysteries were

by that time noised abroad all over the country, and vigilant watch was being kept everywhere for Stead, but Stead had apparently disappeared as completely as if he had been caught up in a flying machine and carried off to Central Africa.

Inspector Cortelyou left no stone unturned in Mannersley itself. Certain that the cashier had some accomplice or confederates in the place, he turned his attention to the two colliers whom Black Moses had heard in conversation with respect to rebutting Ginger King's evidence. But those gentlemen had disappeared. And the detective was not surprised to learn that their disappearance, so far as he could ascertain, had taken place on the afternoon or evening of the day on which Stead had effected his escape from the police station. They were both single men, living in lodgings; from all the police could ascertain, they had simply disappeared suddenly, without reason or excuse, and nobody in the village had noticed their departure. Inspector Cortelyou felt that this had a good deal to do with Stead's disappearance, but the two men seemed to have vanished just as inexplicably.

The detective had no reason to complain of want of help—the fact was that every man in the colliery village seemed to imbibe the idea that he was specially gifted with detective powers, and began to take upon himself duties for which Nature had not quite fitted him. Several bold spirits, considering that it would be a pity to waste the opportunity of exercising their undoubted gifts, stayed away from their work for shift after shift, and instead of going down into the bowels of the earth to get coal, went about the surrounding country trying to catch Stead. Most of these expeditions wound up at some roadside inn, where theories were ventilated and methods explained, and none of them ended in the triumphant capture of the cashier.

On the evening of the day before that on which Sir Clinton Mannersley was to be brought before the magistrates again, Quinton came to Inspector Cortelyou looking somewhat disturbed.

'I have just called on Mr Illingworth,' he said, 'but as he has gone out into the country and won't be back until late, I came to see you, inspector.'

'Yes?' said Inspector Cortelyou. 'Anything wrong?'

'I am afraid there may be tomorrow,' answered the manager. 'You know I get to hear a good deal of what the men are thinking, and what they mean to do, through side-winds. And I have heard something this afternoon which rather alarms me.'

'About the hearing tomorrow, I expect,' said the inspector.

‘Yes,’ replied Quinton. ‘I don’t suppose more than one-third of the men will go down tomorrow. There’ll be a tremendous crowd to give a welcome to Sir Clinton. Some of the men are for stopping the cab and taking the horses out and drawing the cab to the court in triumph.’

‘Oh!’ said the detective. ‘Then I’m afraid they’ll be disappointed. There won’t be any cab. And—this is a secret, of course—Sir Clinton’s here already. He was brought over quietly this evening, and he’s at the police station now. Of course, he knows that he will be discharged tomorrow. So does everybody know it. The more intelligent of the men know it.’

‘Yes, but—it’s the other affair,’ said Quinton, diffidently. ‘That’s where the danger is, inspector.’

‘What danger? What other affair?’ asked Inspector Cortelyou.

‘The previous affair—and his escape,’ explained Quinton. ‘There is an idea—a report—amongst the men that Sir Clinton, after his discharge, will be immediately rearrested and sent back to complete his term of penal servitude, and they are determined to prevent it.’

Inspector Cortelyou stroked his chin. ‘Why, certainly, there will be some little amount of formality in that respect,’ he said, ‘but as a matter of fact, it only will be formal, because I have already got things so far completed in the evidence against Stead on the point of forgery that the authorities have decided to grant Sir Clinton a free pardon—that’s the official way of saying that there’s nothing to be pardoned for,’ he added, with a smile. ‘But why are your men always so very ready to interfere?’

Quinton laughed and shook his head. ‘It’s their way,’ he answered. ‘They have very rough-and-ready ideas of justice, and if they get an idea into their heads that anybody is being badly treated they resent it to the point of actual interference. And I don’t want any rows, inspector,’ he added. ‘So far, all our men have behaved well.’

‘There’s no need why they should behave otherwise now, sir,’ replied the detective. ‘Haven’t you got one or two trusty men to whom you could say a word or two, giving them the hint to spread the news amongst the rest that everything’s all right?’

Quinton reflected; then he thought of Black Moses Pogmore, and said he would go and find him. And the result was that the crowd which gathered around the court next morning, though much bigger in dimensions than at the first hearing, was quiet and orderly, and chiefly concerned in giving Sir Clinton a rousing reception when he came out—a free man.

Inside, the court was packed to the doors. The bench was again filled; there was no room at the solicitors' table nor anywhere in the well of the court; the galleries and back benches were filled to their utmost capacity. Of all the people who had been there before only Marshall Stead was missing.

The merely formal proceedings which led to Clinton's discharge from custody were soon over, and then the court became a pandemonium from which the police and officials found it difficult to make a way for the released man and his cousin. And suddenly Phillipa, as in a dream, found herself standing on the steps outside the court, with Clinton on one side of her and Quinton on the other, and in front a vast-stretching crowd of men in their Sunday best, who were shouting as if at a popular St Leger winner. The men would have a speech—Sir Clinton must speak to them—they must and would hear his voice! Then they cheered again, until he laughingly showed signs of obeying their will by climbing to the balustrades and removing his hat.

'Friends and neighbours!' he began.

But what he was going to say was never said. At that moment a mighty reverberation, as of the loudest thunder, burst as it seemed all around them; and looking round with blanched faces men saw a gigantic column of smoke break from the mouth of the colliery shaft, and in the moment that followed a sudden shrill cry pierced every ear: 'The pit! The pit! An explosion at the pit! And my man's gone down!'

# 23
## Five Hundred!

The workings of the Mannersley Main Colliery are well known to all mining experts and to the men who there tear their sustenance from the bowels of the earth to be amongst the most extensive in the country, just as the main shaft is one of the deepest. Some of the miners, who, for lack of accommodation in Mannersley itself, had to live in outlying villages or isolated cottages on the edge of the parish, used to calculate that after descending to the bottom of the shaft they were obliged to walk just as far to the particular spot where they were then labouring as they had walked from their own cottage down to the cage in which they descended; one man in particular who had a turn for exactitude and locality affirmed that he had once worked exactly beneath his own bit of garden, which was a mile and three-quarters from the pit brow. The ramifications of these workings spread far and wide in all directions; many of them were never used or visited, and Dogger Tandy had therefore spoken wisely when he told Marshall Stead that somewhere in their burrow-like twistings was the place for him to hide—he would be as safe there for a few days as if he had been suddenly transplanted to South Africa. And there Stead was—safe underground.

It had been an easy enough thing to get him down there, and to hide him away. Once dressed up in an old suit of Dogger Tandy's pit-garments, with a little elementary make-up to assist in the disguise, with a food-pail in one hand and a lamp in the other, he had got down the shaft in the easiest fashion possible, nobody paying the least attention to him. And down below Tandy proved himself an excellent guide. He appeared to know every inch of that vast-spreading warren, in which human beings, half-naked, grimed and blackened with coal dust, dragged fuel from the earth's womb with infinite cost of sweat and labour to themselves. It was indeed a warren, thought Stead, as Tandy hurried him along galleries and passages, and he caught glimpses of forms and lights in all directions, and it made him feel a momentary sensation of queerness to realise that the green grass, and the fresh

air, and the wide-spreading sky, the busy village, the winding river, and the grey castle were twelve hundred feet above it.

The disused working, of which Tandy had spoken as being safe and never visited, was one of which great things had been expected and never realised. Dogger Tandy knew how to get into it from the main workings without attracting attention; it was only a question of slipping away up this gallery and down that. He led Stead to the hiding place he had thought of as surely as an old mole might have led a young visitor to the most decent chamber of its underground castle.

This hiding place was a roofed and boarded room, which had been intended for an underlooker's office. Tandy contrived to get some horse rugs there, and from the disused stables near by he procured a quantity of hay, which had been left and was quite dry; the place was naturally warm enough, and Stead would do well enough in it in that respect. They had brought with them a food supply for a day and a half—the full extent of time which they considered it would be necessary for the fugitive to remain there. And so in this place of darkness Stead was left.

The experience was not pleasant—he had to admit that before he had been three hours alone. It was as if he were fastened up in the middle of the world, with all the world's weight pressing upon him on every side. The blackness seemed to tingle with life; he thought of how awful it would be if strange shapes materialised out of it; if it had not been that by cautiously creeping some little distance along the gallery to a point where he could hear the distant ring of picks and shovels, and occasionally a shouting voice, he would have gone mad. The silence, the sense of oppression, was awful. He longed to be out again, to feel the air and see the sky.

But when Dogger Tandy came to visit him in his hiding place the first time, that worthy individual shook his head as he set his lamp, and one he had brought Stead, down on the rough table which stood in the middle of the disused office.

'It's no use trying to cut it yet, guv'nor,' he said, producing a parcel of food and a number of much-crumpled newspapers. 'You wouldn't be safe for a moment once you poked your nose outside the shaft. They're on to your track, and no mistake!'

Stead uttered an impatient exclamation. 'I can't stay here much longer!' he said. 'I can't!'

Tandy shook his head. ‘The second day won’t be as bad as the first, guv’nor,’ he said. ‘And, after all, it ain’t a prison, nor yet a penal servitude establishment. My! but they are keeping a bright lookout for you. If so be as you was the size of a flea, guv’nor, I don’t believe you could get out of Mannersley just now! No; you must wait, guv’nor, till the coast’s a bit clear. I’ve brought enough food and drink of the best for another day, good, so you’ll not starve.’

Stead took a pull at the contents of the tin bottle which the miner had brought. He drank feverishly.

‘What is being done up there?’ he asked, impatiently. ‘Surely there must be some way of getting off!’

Tandy folded his arms and crossed his legs as he sat down on the edge of the table.

‘There’s a whole heap of newspapers there, guv’nor, as you can read while the lamp lasts, and that’ll be ten hours,’ he said, ‘and—’

‘I wish there was a way of escaping that dark spell!’ interrupted Stead. ‘That’s the worst time of it.’

‘Ah!’ said the miner, spitting on the floor and shaking his head. ‘That’s when you want to go to sleep, guv’nor. That’s—’

Stead snatched at the newspapers. ‘Well, what if I look at these,’ he said, snappishly. ‘I suppose you know all there is in them?’

‘Pretty well nearly all, guv’nor,’ replied Tandy. ‘Them newspaper fellers has a knack, you know, of worming their way everywhere, and getting to know everything. What I said was that, leaving alone whatever I can tell you, you’ll see if you read them papers that you’re a done man if you slip out of this for a day or two. That’s a fact, guv’nor.’

And Stead, when he had glanced over the various accounts in the daily newspapers which Tandy had brought him, had to admit that it would be a very difficult thing to escape from Mannersley just then. He had, perforce, to accept the conditions of his plight and to suffer another twenty-four hours of life in his underground dungeon.

And at the end of that time things were no better. Tandy came back next night with a longer face than before.

‘They’ve got a lot of new bobbies, both uniformed and plain-clothed, into the place, guv’nor,’ he said. ‘And there’s lots of our chaps taken to playing private detective, and on the prowl all round the countryside for you. I’ll

have to put my thinking-box to work to get you out of this. And what's more, guv'nor, there's a handsome reward out for you.'

Stead looked at him with a sudden anxiety. His liberty was in this man's hands.

'You know what I've promised you if you get me away safely,' he said. 'And I've given you a hundred pounds in gold already. Remember that.'

'The reward's five hundred, guv'nor,' answered Tandy. 'You promised me three hundred. Of course, you'll make the three up to five, now?'

'How do I know such a reward is promised?' asked Stead, with some irascibility. 'I know nothing—down here.'

In silence the collier threw down a police handbill before him and pointed to some figures.

'That's in every shopwindow, big or little, in Mannersley, guv'nor,' he said, after a pause, during which Stead read the notice through. 'And they say it's posted up at every police station in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales—so there! Of course, you'll make it at least five hundred, guv'nor?'

Stead uttered an impatient exclamation. 'Get me out of this and safely away, and come with me and you shall have five hundred!' he said. 'Do it, and you'll not find me particular.'

Tandy went off to his work to ruminate. He had no wish to give Stead up to the authorities so long as he could make out of him what they would give; besides, he thought he knew a way of squeezing him for more. And as he hacked and hewed at the shining black coal in the little hole in which he was working, doubled up like some antediluvian animal of strange shape, he cogitated on many plans for getting Stead out of the mine and away from Mannersley. Two or three hours later he perceived a feasible plan of escape, and after much thought he was so pleased with it that he set off to Stead in his dungeon-like refuge to talk it over with him.

The accumulated coal dust lay thick as the sand in the seashore on the floors of the gallery by which Tandy approached the place where the fugitive lay hid. His boots were old and soft in the sole; having a naturally sly manner of approaching anything, which had been accentuated by his poaching habits, he was at the entrance of the disused office before Stead, who had certainly not expected to see him, was aware that he was near, and the consequence was that Dogger Tandy came full upon a sight which made his ferret-eyes grow unnaturally large with sheer surprise.

Stead sat at the rough table in the centre of the cell-like room; the miner's lamp before him threw its light full on his face and eyes. But its yellow rays fell on something else—on something that he had spread out on one of the newspapers which Tandy had brought him; and, yellow as the light was, that something glittered and coruscated in it like dew-drops in a summer sun. Diamonds!

Tandy uttered a little cough and stepped in. Stead made a sound which was more like a woman's frightened scream than anything else, and covered the sparkling stones with both hands. He turned a livid and snarling face on the miner.

'Confound you!' he snapped out. 'What do you startle me like that for?'

Tandy stepped to the table and sat on it. His eyes, covetous and greedy, were fixed on Stead's hands.

'Easy, guv'nor, easy!' he said. 'There's no call to use swear words to me what's done so much for you. And what's them, guv'nor?'

'Go away!' said Stead. 'What do you mean by spying on me in this way?'

'Spying? Nay, guv'nor, I only just looked in to say I had an idea,' replied Tandy. 'I can't help it if you didn't hear, but you were so engaged. Diamonds, eh, guv'nor? Now, I shouldn't wonder if that's what was in that little packet you got me to dig out of your orchard the other night, guv'nor, eh? You said it was letters, you did!'

'What's it matter to you?' said Stead, sullenly.

'A good deal, guv'nor,' replied the miner. 'In course, if you're wanting to escape with a few thousands of pounds' worth of shiners—well, Dogger Tandy'll naturally expect to have his little bit out of it. Think it over, guv'nor.'

And Tandy went back to his work without saying a word of his plan of escape. He knew he had his man safe. From that moment Stead had no peace of mind. He was afraid to go to sleep, lest Tandy should come and murder him for the sake of the diamonds; he was afraid to eat his food, lest Tandy should poison him. And Tandy kept him there, and two days later looked at him severely when he brought meat, drink, and light.

'I know now where you got them shiners, mate,' he said, dropping the more respectful title. 'Them's Miss Mannersley's, and you pinched 'em from the Castle. You're a nice 'un, you are! And now, of course, it'll be half shares, see?'

That day—though he could not tell by that time whether it was day or night down there, for Tandy sometimes came down by the afternoon shift and sometimes by the night shift—Stead made up his mind to escape. He would take his luck. And with the diamonds in his pocket he groped his way along the pitch-black galleries until he came to the part where the disused workings ended and those in use began. And there he met Dogger Tandy.

Dogger Tandy took him by the throat with a sudden curse and with the snarl of a dog who sees its bone being stolen, and then began a fight of that sort which quickly degenerates into a far worse thing.

# 24

## Down in the Mine

From the feeling of half-wild and primitive joy which impelled the Mannersley folk to give their favourite the heartiest of demonstrations on his release, the entire community was suddenly brought face to face with the conviction of awful tragedy and sorrow. The men who a moment before had been shouting and yelling at the top of their voices, grew strangely silent, and turned to look at each other with white faces; the women on the fringe of the crowd who had been laughing and waving their hands at the two cousins on the courthouse steps began to scream and weep, and in the case of those whose men had gone down with the last shift, to develop hysterics. For a full two minutes everything around the court, which, as the principal building in the mining village, stood in an open space in the centre of the main street, was a scene of confusion, of women's cries, of men's harsh voices, of awestricken questionings. And then, as with a common impulse, everybody there, high and low, old and young, set off, a motley mass of humanity—pushing, struggling, exclaiming—for the pithead, over which still hung the great dun-coloured mass of smoke, out of which the tell-tale flame and flash of the explosion had died away as suddenly as it had come.

If anyone there had had time to think he would have noticed the horrible contrast between the calm pitilessness of Nature and the terror-striking aspects of the situation. It was a glorious summer morning—a morning which had made Phillipa Mannersley's heart dance, in spite of all her recent troubles, so full was it of life and the gladness of the earth. High above the old elms which surrounded the ancient Castle the rooks were circling and eddying in a cloudless sky of blue; in the woods on each side of the valley birds were singing and insects humming in an abandon of delight at the warmth and brightness of summer. The long and formal rows of miners' cottages, stretching down from the main street to the river, seemed to take something of new colouring from the sun; in them such children as were not at school were playing merrily. Everything had seemed bright that morning—the ma-

jority of the men had evidently meant to make holiday, and had donned their best clothes and brightest neckerchiefs; the women had laughed and chatted at their doors. But now, with that awful pillar of slowly-drifting smoke hanging over the giant shafting of the colliery, the brightness and gaiety had gone, and in their place was nothing but woe and desolation, and the mind-tearing horror of uncertainty.

Phillipa's motorcar was standing near the courthouse, and before she fully realised what was happening she found herself in it, with Clinton at her side, and Quinton on the opposite side, speeding away in the direction of the pit-yard. On all sides men, women, and children were hastening in the same direction.

It was with difficulty that Phillipa refrained from bursting into tears as the motor swung round into the pit-yard. The folk who lived nearest to the colliery had naturally streamed towards it at the first alarm, and had made for the shaft, from which only their own sense of order and fear of impeding rescue measures now kept them off. They stood in crowded ranks, which were momentarily added to as fresh contingents came hurrying in, and over them had fallen a silence that seemed worse than loud outcries of grief. They gazed at the motor and its occupants with eyes which seemed to see nothing as the driver made his way to the enginehouse—at any other time they would have greeted Phillipa and her cousin with a rousing cheer. And as the motor stopped and its occupants got out, some of the women rushed forward and seized the young proprietress anywhere they could lay hold of her—by her hands, her sleeve, her gown.

'Oh, Miss Phillipa, my man's down—and us only wed a month, miss! Oh, Miss Phillipa, get 'em to do something!'

'Oh, miss, there's my husband and the three lads all down—all I have in the world!'

Quinton firmly but kindly pushed the women aside, and hurried Phillipa towards the door of the enginehouse.

'Now, my good souls, let Miss Mannersley through,' he said. 'We'll do everything we can to get the men up—don't interfere with us—let us get to work.'

Clinton sprang back on the car which they had just left, and, taking off his cap, faced the people, who at sight of him became as quiet as a flock of sheep.

'Now, lads and lassies!' he said, his voice ringing far out across the pit-yard. 'There's one thing for you to do—keep your hearts up! We'll have a rescue party down in no time, and Mr Quinton and I are going down with it. We'll not rest till we've got every man and lad out safe and sound; and if we can't—well, then Heaven's will be done. Show yourselves brave men and women!'

Then he turned and ran for the enginehouse, where Quinton had already installed Phillipa, and was busily talking to an anxious and white-faced knot of officials, who were pouring in upon him disjointed scraps of information.

'There'll be about five hundred down—maybe a few less, sir.'

'It must have been in one of the far workings—the shaft's clearing now.'

'The running-gear's all right—we can get down.' Quinton gathered up every scrap of news as it fell, and sent one man here, another there. The entire staff began to bustle about, and Quinton turned to Phillipa and the young Baronet.

'We'll be able to get down soon,' he said. 'I'll pick out the most likely men as volunteers—every man in the yard would go, given the chance.'

'I'm going,' said Clinton.

The manager looked at him with a keen glance, and then at Phillipa. Her eyes telegraphed her answer back to him.

'Yes.'

Quinton, as in a flash, knew what she was thinking. This was the right thing to do—this act of heroism would wipe out all Clinton's short-comings, his youthful escapades. He knew then that Phillipa loved Clinton, and that his own cause was hopeless, and he admired her all the more because she was courageous enough to let the man she cared for go to certain danger and possible death. 'All right,' he said. 'I'll see about things.'

And he hurried out, leaving Phillipa and Clinton alone. The others in the enginehouse were busied in various ways—the cousins stood apart in a corner looking out upon the anxious, patient crowd outside. And suddenly they turned and looked at each other.

'Phillipa,' said Clinton, 'you never doubted me!'

'Never for one moment, Clinton,' she answered.

'I knew it would come right,' he said. 'It's been like an awful dream, these last three years. But—it's over now.'

'Yes,' she said. 'It's over—now.'

Then she suddenly had a vision of the black depths far below, of what had gone on there so few, few minutes before, of what might be going on there now; of men, boys, horses lying dead or dying in the poisonous, curling vapours; and she suddenly sank down into the nearest chair and turned very white.

'Oh, Clinton!' she gasped. 'I—I don't want you to go!'

Clinton turned a set face to her—there was a stern look on it that she had never seen there before.

'Hush, Phillipa!' he said. 'None of that, now. This is where I pay old scores off, don't you see. I'm going—and I'm not coming up until I've done all I can. I've done plenty of weak things in my time—now I'm going to do something strong. You be strong too. We'll have time enough to think about ourselves when this is over.'

'Supposing you're killed?' she whispered.

'I told you—none of that!' he said, sternly. 'If I am—well, I shall be trying to do something decent, anyway. This is going to be the start of a new life, Phillipa, whether it's short or long!'

Phillipa regained her self-possession with a great effort, and, rising to her feet, took Clinton's hand and pressed it.

'Yes, you're right, dear,' she said. 'Forgive me—after all, I'm only a girl.'

Clinton pointed through the window. Outside in the yard Quinton and his under-manager were being pursued by men anxious to join the rescue party. Amongst them towered the big form of Black Moses Pogmore. Quinton pointed to him, and motioned him to the enginehouse; then to another, and another, until a dozen men had passed inside, of whom one was Jim Britten. Phillipa and Clinton approached him.

'You going down, Jim?' said Clinton. 'Remember, you're all your mother's got.'

'I shouldn't dare to face her, sir, if I didn't go down,' said Jim, smiling in spite of the concern on his face. 'She'd tell me her mind pretty hot and strong, I can tell you.'

Quinton came bustling in with the district inspector, who had just arrived. Both ran their eyes over the men whom the manager had picked out for the rescue party.

'It's fortunate that we've got everything that's modern in the way of appliances,' said Quinton, hurriedly. 'There's no need to send for anything.

You, Britten, and you, Pogmore, get out the things, and see that every man is properly fitted and understands how the appliances work. Sir Clinton, you help Britten and Pogmore—Britten'll explain the working of the oxygen tubes to you if you don't know. Miss Mannersley, if you want to do something, go out into the yard and walk up and down before the people and talk to them, especially to the women. Keep them cool and hopeful—that's the thing.'

The manager hurried off in one direction, Jim Britten, with Clinton and Black Moses, in another, and Phillipa walked out into the yard. She caught scraps of comment and conversation as she approached the first group of women.

'I ha' a man and two lads buried i' Shafterley churchyard—all killed together.'

'My father and two brothers were in that there explosion at Mosbury Pit twenty years ago—they looked as if they were asleep when they brought 'em up, they were that peaceful.'

'I mind my two brothers walking out o' th' house-place one morning just such another as this—they were laughing and talking—but we never seed 'em again, and it broke my mother's heart.'

Phillipa went down the line, giving words of hope and comfort to the waiting women. They gazed with admiration at her pretty face, and listened hungrily to her sweet voice; but it was plain that there would be no hope for them until certainty was arrived at—they were all of the collier class, and knew what pit life was. No, there was nothing to do but wait, wait, wait!

She had reached the farther end of the yard where she met Inspector Cortelyou, who seemed to be engaged on a similar mission to her own. Together they turned and went up the other side of the yard; and suddenly a woman—a colourless, thin, half-starved looking woman, ragged, scarred of face—pushed her way out of the crowd and caught Phillipa's sleeve. Phillipa stopped, staring at her; the detective stopped too, so curious was the woman's appearance, so odd her behaviour.

'Miss!' she said, in a sibilant whisper, which only Inspector Cortelyou could catch. 'My man's down below! These here others can blather as much as they like for theirs, but I hope mine's done for—I hope the devil's gotten him!—he were that cruel to me. Dogger Tandy they call him—he were that fond o' dogs. And I say, miss, I'll tell you something.'

Phillipa, half-afraid, was shrinking away, but the woman's claw-like fingers held her fast. The detective drew nearer.

'I'll tell you something,' whispered the woman. 'There's somebody down there with my man—Marshall Stead! Him as the p'lice wants. I know. That's where he's hidden. Down i' th' mine. They thought I didn't know, but I did!'

She slipped back into the crowd, and Inspector Cortelyou and Phillipa stared after her and then at each other. They were about to speak, when a sudden commotion turned their attention to the pithead. The rescue party, headed by Clinton and the manager, was on its way to the shaft.

# 25
## The Last Match

Ever since he had set eyes on them Dogger Tandy had been sorely exercised in mind about the diamonds which he had found Marshall Stead gloating over. Like most people who do not know much about such matters, and, who have heard stories about them which bordered on the miraculous, he began to attach an enormous value to them. He had read about diamonds in the newspapers, he had dim and vague ideas that he had heard it said that the King or the Queen, he was not sure which, had diamonds which were worth millions. The more he thought of those which he had seen Stead handling, the more valuable they seemed to become. Certainly, he said to himself, he would have his share out of them, and a handsome share too. He would give up all work, of course. He would go away from Mannersley and his ill-favoured wife. He would buy himself a nice house somewhere outside a big town, and he would keep a dogcart and a good horse, and have greyhounds; he would smoke large cigars and drink whisky all day long, and be a gentleman. He had as much right to, at any rate, half the diamonds as Stead had. Yes, of course, it was only right that he should have his proper and lawful share.

While he thus argued within himself there suddenly came into Dogger Tandy's mind a new idea, which made him first feel very hot and then very cold, and then very hot again. He faced that idea boldly, and took a fresh quid of tobacco whereon to ruminate over it. It seemed such a grand idea.

Why should he not have the diamonds for himself? Not a quarter nor half of them, but all—all!

When the newness of this idea, its unaccustomedness, had worn off, Dogger Tandy had become so enamoured of it, so familiar with it, that he wondered he had not thought of it before—thought of it at once. Why, the diamonds were as good as his own already! If he chose to put out his hand for them, who was going to stop him from taking them? Certainly not Stead. He laughed at the thought. He could break Stead in two with one

hand. Besides, what right had Stead to retain property which wasn't his? Dogger Tandy's creed was a simple and well-known one, and very familiar to a lot of people, supposedly his superiors in station, education, and ability. It was simply that

> *Those should take who have the power,*
> *And they should keep who can.'*

Dogger Tandy knew himself in the position to take; if Stead could manage to keep, let him. But he wasn't. Dogger Tandy laughed to himself. Stead was as safe as a rat in a trap. He could not get out of the hole underground without his (Tandy's) aid. Therefore, Stead did not count. He was in the position of the small boy who has sixpence and is defenceless before the big boy who means to have that sixpence.

Of course, he had no intention of murdering Stead for the sake of the diamonds. No—but, equally, of course, if Stead would not hand them over he would have to make him. He might have to hurt him—well, that would be his own fault. Dogger Tandy was not by any means a sentimentalist, and had no intention of sticking at trifles.

And so, as Stead, panic-stricken with fear because he knew that Tandy knew, and nerve-shaken by his days and nights twelve hundred feet beneath the surface, was creeping along the galleries to evade Tandy—Tandy was advancing to meet him. When they met the struggle was short and sharp. The miner nearly shook the life out of the escaping fugitive, and, dragging him back to his place of hiding, flung him, bruised and breathless, on his bed of sacking, and administered a sound kick to him, which made him groan with fear as much as with pain.

'So that's how you would treat me, you white-livered cur, you!' said Dogger Tandy, towering over his captive with lifted fist. 'Break out without paying up, would you? We'll see about that, my lad. Hand over those shiners, d'ye hear, else I'll make you as you'll never see daylight again! Quick now!'

'I promised you should have your share,' answered Stead, sobbing with rage and pain. 'They're no use to either of us until I'm out of this; you can't do anything with them.'

'Can't I?' said Tandy. 'Happen I don't know of a chap as can, neither? Oh, no! Hand 'em over, I say!'

‘They’d have you as soon as ever you tried to deal with them!’ cried Stead. ‘The description’s out—it was in all those papers you left.’

Tandy’s sole reply to this was a savage kick, which landed in Stead’s ribs and knocked the breath out of him for the moment. He rolled over sobbing and groaning, and the miner, clutching him by the collar and lifting him as easily as if he had been an infant, dumped him into the chair with one hand, and smote the table with the other.

‘Out with ’em!’ he said, with a terrible oath. ‘Plank ’em down, every man jack of ’em! Keep a single one back, and smash every bone in your body!’

More dead than alive from fright and agony, Stead drew a canvas bag from some secret receptacle in his clothing, and laid it on the table. Watching him fixedly, the miner slowly untied the string which fastened the bag, and shook the glittering gems out on the table. Then, remembering how he himself had been searched by the police on more than one occasion, he lifted Stead up again with one hand and went through him with the other in quite professional style, discovering nothing, however, but another bag in which money jingled. This, too, he threw on the table beside the diamonds. After which, with another hearty kick, he flung Stead on the sacking again and shook his fist at him.

‘What’s the use of golden sovereigns and diamonds to you down here?’ he snarled. ‘You can’t buy wittles with ’em, nor yet a drop of liquor, nor yet a bit o’ ‘bacca. Aren’t you dependent on me for your bite and sup, you ungrateful dog? Who’s a-keepin’ of you safe from the hangman, you scoundrel? I’ll learn you to treat me uncivil. You shall have a spell o’ starvation and darkness, my beauty, till you know your master, and then happen I’ll do something for you, d’ye see!’

He had restored the diamonds to their bag as he spoke, and now, transferring both bags to his pocket, he picked up the lamp, and with a fierce scowl and a shake of his fist, turned to leave Stead alone in darkness.

It was at this point that Stead’s sanity gave way. With a howl which was more like that of a desperate brute than a man he made one bound at the miner, and, fastening on his throat with tearing and gripping fingers, bore him to the ground, and, screaming in his madness, strove to squeeze the life out of him.

Tandy, surprised by the suddenness of the attack, fell against the wall; the safety lamp slipped out of his hand, and rolling away on the floor was suddenly extinguished. He recognised, with a curious alertness of mind, that he

was engaged in a death-like struggle with a madman whom despair and fear had endowed with superhuman strength, and that he would need all his own resource and energy to combat it. Already he felt the blood bursting in the veins in his head from the fierceness of Stead's grip on his throat, already he felt his breath coming in shorter gasps. The grip was like that of a giant; in a short time it would—ah!

Dogger Tandy was quick to think in ways of violence. He had long, powerful, muscular arms, and hands as strong as an ape's. Finding he could not tear Stead's grip away from his throat, he got one hand at the back of his opponent's head, the other firmly under his chin. Then he braced himself for the effort, and with the force of a machine jerked the other man's head upwards and backwards until he heard the spine crack and felt a convulsive tremor run through the body, the grip on his own throat relax and become as feeble as a child's. He shook the body off, and rose, trembling, to his feet, in the darkness.

'He would have it, curse him!' he muttered to himself. 'I wouldn't ha' finished him if it hadn't been that he'd ha' finished me—I'm most strangled as it is. Curse that lamp—I shall have to find my way out now in the darkness.'

Feeling for the table, he leant against it for a minute or two to recover his breath. Then he began to feel about in the hope of discovering the tin bottle in which he had brought drink to Stead during his captivity. He found it at last and shook it eagerly; there was nothing in it.

Dogger Tandy threw the empty bottle away with another oath, and shook himself together. He stumbled forward a step or two, and bending down felt for Stead's body; then, undoing the clothing, placed his hand on the heart.

'He's a goner,' he muttered, rising up. 'A goner, right enough. Well, serve him right—he shouldn't ha' tried to throttle me, curse him! Well, let's be clearing out.'

Mechanically, he thrust his hand into the pocket of his rough jacket to feel if his prize was safe. Another curse broke from him—the diamonds were gone.

'Can't be far away,' he said. 'Must ha' slipped out when he flew at me.'

Dogger Tandy got down on his hands and knees and began to feel about the floor. He knew that he and the dead man had rolled hither and thither in the struggle, but, after all, the area was circumscribed, and the bag must be close at hand. And yet, feel about as he would in the soft coal dust-strewn

surface, he could not lay his hands on what he sought. He began to swear beneath his breath, for he was beginning to realise two things in no very pleasant fashion—first, that he was alone with a dead man, whose life he had taken, and second, that the impenetrable blackness was beginning to weigh heavily upon him, and that his nerves were getting unstrung. He searched with his fingers more eagerly than ever, but the diamonds eluded him.

Then Dogger Tandy suddenly remembered something. He remembered that in his pocket there were some matches—three matches.

Now it was a very terrible thing to be in possession of matches in the workings of Mannersley Main Colliery, and Dogger Tandy had no business to have those matches on his person. But he had these, and he knew where they were in a hole in the lining of the waistcoat pocket, and were all that remained of a small stock which he had kept there. And in his eagerness to find the bag containing the diamonds he felt for them and drew one out. Standing up in the darkness he ruminated.

'I never heard of no gas in these here workings,' he said. 'Anyhow, I'm going to chance it—I can't stop here forever a-feeling about, as if I was a-playing blind-man's-buff.'

And he struck the match on the sole of his boot, and, carefully shielding the flame with the other hand, bent down and looked quickly about him.

The little washleather bag lay close at hand—just by Marshall Stead's shoulder. He made a snatch and secured it, but not without seeing the dead man's wide-open eyes, now glazed and staring and terrible.

The flame of the match died out. Now the darkness seemed ten thousand times more dense and impenetrable than ever, and Dogger Tandy began to sweat with fear of it, and of those staring eyes and that rigid form. He felt his way out of the disused office and into the gallery, and made off as fast as he could towards the new workings.

But the blackness and silence, and the thought of what he had left behind, were strong upon him. He knew little of where he was going, for he had never visited that part of the mine without a lamp, and before he had gone far he realised that he was not going in the right direction. It seemed to him that he had taken some wrong turning, and he stopped, feeling at the walls on either side. The walls told him nothing, and he grew desperate. He hesitated, and his fingers sought the hole in his waistcoat pocket.

Dogger Tandy struck the second match. He bent down and examined the black dust at his feet. Yes, there were his own footprints—many of them. He was all right. The flame died as he pressed forward again. He went on, feeling the walls, now this side, now the other. Suddenly he ran into a projection that seemed to be in the very middle of the gallery which he was traversing. Dogger Tandy could not remember that projection. Where was it? What was it doing there? Perhaps the gallery divided there, one fork going to the left, the other to the right. At any rate, he must see. He was emboldened now, and his fingers went again to the hole in the waistcoat pocket.

He drew out the last match and lit it.

A sudden blinding, dazzling flash, a great roar as of the letting loose of eternal thunders, a heavy blow as of worlds falling upon him, and then darkness never to be lifted.

# 26

## Inspector Cortelyou Smiles

As Quinton, having marshalled his rescue party and seen that they were all properly equipped and in order, was about to give the signal for the first batch to descend, he felt a sudden tug at his elbow. Turning, he confronted Inspector Cortelyou.

'I am going down with you,' said the detective.

Quinton felt half-annoyed and somewhat at a loss. He had a great respect for Inspector Cortelyou's talents, but he scarcely saw how they could be utilised in service of this sort. He looked at him and shook his head.

'My dear sir,' he said, 'that's very kind and handsome of you, but really, to put it bluntly, I don't think you'd be of any use. You see'—here he pointed to his picked men—'you see the sort of men I need. They're all risking their lives—there's no need for you to risk yours.'

The detective nodded his head and stood his ground. 'You misapprehend me,' he said. 'That's not my reason for going down.' Then, with a look full of meaning, he motioned Quinton aside, and in a low voice said: 'Stead's down there!'

Quinton's eyebrows went up.

'Are you sure of that?' he said.

'I am certain. That's why I must go down,' answered the inspector.

'You'd have to wear one of these appliances,' remarked Quinton, pointing to Black Moses, who stood just in front of them.

'I understand their use quite well,' said the detective.

Quinton hesitated a moment. After all, Inspector Cortelyou was a man of infinite resource and undoubted courage, and if he was not physically big he was mentally great, and might be useful.

'All right,' he said, pointing to the enginehouse. 'Go in there and get fitted. The Government inspector's just come; you can go down with him and me. Only hurry.'

So Inspector Cortelyou went down into the depths to seek his prey. The crowd watched him go with the rest, and wondered why so small and apparently fragile a man should be allowed to go down. Then they decided that he was some expert or other. But Phillipa, who had seen a certain gleam in the detective's eyes when he heard what Dogger Tandy's wife had to say, formed her own conclusions as to the reasons of Inspector Cortelyou's expedition underground. He wanted to find Marshall Stead, dead or alive, believing that where Stead was found the diamonds would also be found.

Then began the most heartsickening episode of all colliery disasters—the first waiting for news. The telephonic apparatus had been destroyed in the explosion, and no news had come from below. It was not at first known if the cage could descend, but presently it was made evident that the shaft was clear, and the cage fell and rose, and fell and rose again, until all the rescuing party had gone below. Then suddenly it came up again, and out of it sprang the under-manager, his face working with excitement. He sprang on a wagon that stood close at hand, and lifted his arms amidst a dead silence.

'The explosion's not been in the present workings!' he shouted. 'There's a lot of men, safe and unharmed, at the bottom of the shaft, and others are coming in every minute from the galleries. We're going to start sending them up at once.'

Then he shot down into the black depths again, and the crowd, shouting in its eagerness, drew nearer the pit mouth, and made a lane, every face looking for the first signs of some face known to it.

Phillipa, who stood near the opening to the shaft with some of the officials and the old Vicar, who had hurried down to the scene immediately on hearing the news, felt herself deeply affected as the cage rose from time to time and brought up the temporarily imprisoned men. The anxious faces around her eagerly watching for a familiar figure were pathetic in the extreme—if that figure appeared out of the gloom the anxiety turned to a delight that was almost childish. Women sobbed and laughed in the same breath; grown men, stolid enough at all other times, almost danced in their excitement as they clasped hands with the rescued; everywhere there was tumult, a babel of voices. But amidst the rejoicings there were still the white faces and anxious eyes of those whose men had not yet come up, and the rescued were always having their sleeves pulled by women thirsting for news.

'Eh, Bill, hast thou seen our Tom?'

'Jim—were aught seen o' my lads?'

Phillipa and the old clergyman made their way to where a big miner—one of the first to come up—was evidently explaining the state of things below to a group of his acquaintances. The men made way for them.

'Tell Miss Mannersley here what has happened, Jack,' said one.

The big miner, who had doffed his cap at Phillipa's approach, scratched his head.

'Why, miss,' he said, 'it's hard to say what did happen down there. Me and my motty—'

'He means his mate, Ben Smith,' interjected one of the crowd.

'My mate, then,' continued the big miner. 'We were working, d'ye see, miss, happen half a mile from the bottom o' the shaft, peaceful like. All of a sudden comes this tremendous clap—thunder wasn't in it. Ben Smith—he hasn't come up yet, hasn't Ben, but he's safe—he says to me, "That's an explosion, and a big 'un," he says. "We'd best be shiftin'." So we makes for the shaft, and comes across lots o' chaps making there too from all directions, and they was all asking the same question, Where was it? 'Cause it were certain sure, d'ye see, miss, it wasn't in our part o' the mine. There was cerr'nly some smoke and suchlike come along as we got nearer the shaft, but it were naught to signify. Of course, we did the right thing in aiming to get out, miss, 'cause there's oft a second burst-up when there's been one at all. But in my opinion every man jack down there's alive and safe, 'cause the explosion were not in our part o' the mine at all—not it!'

'Oh, I am so thankful!' exclaimed Phillipa. 'But where was the explosion then, do you think?'

'Why, miss,' answered the big miner, 'in my opinion, seeing which way the smoke was coming, I believe it were in that working what hasn't been used for some time—what we call the Wellington. Now, that there working, miss, is fair under Man nersley main street; me and Ben Smith once calculated that Robinson's shop is right over it. You can get into it from one o' the galleries in our working. That's where it's been, miss, sure as fate. But it's queer—it's uncommon queer.'

'What is queer?' inquired Phillipa.

'Why, miss, that there should ha' been any explosion at all,' replied the man. 'Explosions doesn't come without cause. Somebody must ha' gone into that working; but what call had anybody to go there? And whoever it were must ha' opened a lamp or struck a light. Now this here colliery's al-

ways singularly free from gas, miss, as every man here can tell you; but still, there is gas, and there may ha' been a storage in that working. But somebody's been there as didn't ought to ha' been there, and that somebody's had a light—and this is the result. That's what I say, miss, as was on the spot and thankful to be saved.'

Phillipa's thoughts had gone back to the dreadful Tandy woman, whose husband was down below, and with him Marshall Stead. Could it be that—that Stead had been hiding in the disused working and had caused the explosion? She turned again to the big miner, whom some friend had now supplied with food and drink, and who was busied therewith.

'If anybody was in that working,' she said, 'what would happen to him?'

The miner, whose cheeks were bulging with bread and meat, shook his head expressively.

'Wouldn't have a chance, miss,' said all the other men in chorus. 'Not a chance.'

Phillipa and the old Vicar went back to the pithead and waited. The hours went by under the light blue of the heavens and the glitter of the hot sun, and still the cage rose and fell, and the men and lads came up in steady streams. As they came the officials kept a list; at last a solitary individual came up alone and spoke to them. One of the sub-managers mounted a wagon.

'We believe every man's got out of the mine!' he shouted over the heads of the crowd. 'Is there anybody here who hasn't claimed their relatives? Have you all got your men and boys back?'

For a moment there was no answer. Then, to Phillipa's alarm, Tandy's wife, more dishevelled, more frightful than ever, darted into the open space and raised her skinny arm.

'I haven't!' she shrieked. 'My man's down there! And he can stop there and starve, same as he's starved me!'

Some of the women began to laugh unthinkingly. Phillipa stopped them.

'Hush—hush!' she said. 'Don't you see the poor creature is either out of her mind or nearly so. Help me to get her away.'

Some of the more serious-minded, who knew very well that poor Mrs Tandy had had ample cause to lose what wits she ever had long since, came forward and took her off to a cottage outside the yard. The rest of the crowd waited. They knew now that it was almost absolutely certain that no lives had been lost, but they lingered to see the rescue party return.

Its members began coming up at last, in threes and fours, with intervals between the arrival of each. And as the afternoon drew to a close, Clinton Mannersley and Quinton appeared together, coal-blackened, weary, but safe.

The great crowd had been waiting to deliver itself of its pent-up thankfulness and enthusiasm. At sight of the young Baronet and the manager it burst into a tumult of wild cheering. But Quinton turned and looked at the cage which they had just left, and gave the crowd an expressive glance as he whispered a word or two to some of the officials, and the crowd understood both glance and word. They had found some bodies and were bringing them up!

Amid the silence, Clinton took his cousin's arm and led her in the direction of the engine-room.

'Come away, Phillipa,' he said. 'We've found two bodies. I don't want you to see them brought up.'

Phillipa said nothing until they were in shelter, and Clinton had been given a drink. Then she whispered:

'Who are they, Clinton?'

Clinton passed his grimy hand across his forehead with a gesture of weariness. 'One of them's a miner—the man they called Dogger Tandy,' he answered. 'I found him—ugh! The other's Marshall Stead. Inspector Cortelyou found him. Phillipa!'

'Yes?' she said, wondering at his look. 'What?'

'Stead had been murdered!'

'Murdered?'

'Without a doubt. There's no doubt whatever that Tandy murdered him.'

'But why?'

Clinton made a wry face. 'For those diamonds!' he answered.

'Diamonds! Not—not my diamonds?' she cried.

'Yes. We found 'em on Tandy's body. Cortelyou—ah, here is Cortelyou.'

The detective entered with his usual soft tread and impassive face. He unbuttoned his coat, and, drawing a hastily rolled up packet from his inner pocket, laid the diamonds on the table at which Phillipa sat. Phillipa rose to her feet with something very near a shriek.

'No, no!' she cried. 'No—I can't touch them—I can't bear to see them—I'll never, never wear them! Please—please take them away! And she hid her face in her hands as if in mortal fear.

Inspector Cortelyou smiled, and hid the diamonds in his pocket.

It was six months later. Mannersley was its old self again. The well-oiled wheels of the great industrial concern were rolling along as smoothly as ever; the mine was pouring its daily tribute of gold at Phillipa Mannersley's feet; the tragic events of the past were becoming memories. And in the coming year the rich young heiress and her cousin—a much graver and manlier Clinton—were going to be married.

The only change was that the manager was going. He had secured an appointment in the Argentine, and had induced Miss Mannersley to release him—he wanted wider fields, greater scope, than England could afford, he said. And so, one winter morning, he said goodbye to Phillipa and Clinton on the little platform of Mannersley Station, and gave both of them his best wishes for their married life.

'But you'll be sure to come and see us, old chap, the very first time you're in England again,' cried Clinton, as the train moved off. 'Promise!'

'Promise—promise!' cried Phillipa, waving her handkerchief.

Quinton smiled, nodded, and waved his hand. He watched them until the train had carried him out of sight. Then he sat down with the sigh of a man who knows that one page of his life is turned. He knew that he would never see them or Mannersley again.